THE MASSACRE OF THE NELSON BUCK PARTY

FROM

PONTIAC, ILLINOIS

by

Dale C. Maley

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The Massacre of the Nelson Buck Party from Pontiac, Illinois

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Book Design

Chapter 2
The Buck Family Comes to America in 1635

Chapter 3
1833

Chapter 4
1834 to 1852

Chapter 5
1853 to 1867

Chapter 6
1868

Chapter 7
1869

Chapter 8
1870 to 1910

Chapter 9
1911 to 1916

Chapter 10
1917 to 1925

Chapter 11
1926 to 1933

Chapter 12
1934 to 1936

Chapter 13
1937 to 2008

Chapter 14
2009 to 2023

Chapter 15
2024

Chapter 16
Unsolved Mysteries

Chapter 17
Closing Thoughts

References
Recommended Reading
Websites
Author Spotlight

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Edition Number

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Foreword

In 1869, veteran surveyor Nelson Buck recruited five young Pontiac, Illinois, men between the ages of 16 and 20 to accompany him on a surveying expedition to southern Nebraska. When they reached Nebraska, he recruited about another six younger men to join the survey party. Nelson Buck expected the U.S. Army to issue his men guns, ammunition, and an armed escort. His requests were turned down, and he decided to start the survey anyway. Two days from the Army fort, the party ran into members of the Sioux tribe. Buck sent two of the Pontiac boys back to the fort to get help. When the Army investigated, no member of the Nelson Buck surveying party was found. The only survivors were the two Pontiac boys who went to the fort for help. It is hoped this book will help to inform future generations about the history of the Nelson Buck surveying party in Nebraska in 1869.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to the Livingston County Historical Society for allowing access to the records of the historical society.

Many thanks go to Judith K. Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

Thanks also go to Ron Baker and Joyce Nagel of the Livingston County Historical Society for reviewing the manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

Book Design

There are four primary historical reference books used whenever research is performed about Livingston County, Illinois.

1878 History Book

The earliest published reference to Livingston County, Illinois history is William Le Baron's 1878 book titled ***The History of Livingston County, Illinois.*** This book will be called the 1878 history book in future references.

1888 History Book

The 1888 history book titled ***Portrait and Biographical Album of Livingston County*** by Chapman Brothers is the second Livingston County history book. This book will be called the 1888 history book in future references.

1900 History Book

The 1900 history book titled ***The Biographical Record of Livingston and Woodford Counties*** by S. J. Clarke is the third Livingston County history book. This book will be called the 1900 history book in future references.

1909 History Book

The 1909 history book titled ***Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Livingston County Volume Two*** by Bateman and Selby is the fourth Livingston County history book. This book will be called the 1909 history book in future references.

Other Important Historical Sources

The Fairbury Blade has now been digitized and is word searchable back to 1871. Access to the Blade archives is free and available from the Dominy Memorial Library website. There were also other newspapers published in Fairbury between its founding in 1857 and 1871. Unfortunately, no copies of these early newspapers exist.

The Pontiac Sentinel was published from 1857 until about 1900. The Pontiac Library microfilm only goes back to 1871. As of February 16, 2024, the Pontiac Library has made the 1871 to 1897 issues of the Sentinel available online to library cardholders.

The Daily Leader has been around since 1896. The Pontiac Library also has made it available online to library cardholders.

For non-members of the Pontiac Library, they can come to the library and use a designated desktop computer to search both the Sentinel and the Daily Leader free of charge.

The website GenealogyBank.com requires an annual subscription fee to access the archived articles. This website has archived copies of the Daily Leader from 1958 to 1970.

The website Ancestry.com requires an annual subscription fee to access the archived newspaper articles. This website has archived copies of the Daily Leader from 1971 to 1977.

The Bloomington Pantagraph newspaper archives are also available online and can be searched back to 1838. There is an annual subscription fee required to access these archives.

Newspapers.com is a website that contains archives of thousands of newspapers. Annual subscription fees are required to access these archives.

Google Books was also an invaluable source for old books with information about this story. NOTE: You must utilize the Google Book option to find these books. The regular Google search feature does not readily identify these old publications.

Citations

If possible, references and dates will be noted for all materials used in this book. In the event no date is available, that fact will be noted.

Sanborn Maps

The Sanborn Insurance Company periodically made maps of many small towns in Central Illinois. Sanborn maps still exist for Pontiac in the years of 1888, 1892,

1897, 1903, 1910, and 1923. Copies of these old maps are available for free from several different websites.

Newspaper Stories

All newspaper stories cited in this book will be presented in the original wording of the article. If the copy of the article had adequate quality, it may be shown as an image. If the article is of poor visual quality, it will be transcribed into text.

Pantagraph Negatives

Starting a few years ago, the Pantagraph released their old photo negatives to the McLean County Museum of History. The museum had the negatives scanned and then posted on a website where anyone can access them for free. Negatives from the Pontiac area can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/37x62cvx. Negatives that were used in this book will be referred to as "Pantagraph negatives."

Archive.Org

Most of the rare documents discovered in researching this book have been uploaded to Archive.Org. Hopefully, this website will survive for many years in the future, and future researchers can easily find this material.

Author's Background in Surveying

The author grew up on a farm about halfway between Fairbury and Pontiac, Illinois. The author graduated from the University of Illinois in 1978 with a B.S. in Agricultural Engineering specializing in Power and Machinery.

Circa 1977, the author spent three hours surveying as part of an Agricultural Engineering class. In the classroom, we studied how land was legally described and the township grid system. For the surveying lab outdoors, we started at a known point, then moved around in a rough circle back to the original starting point covering about 15 acres on the south campus of the University of Illinois. We moved through six or eight points as we traversed around an area of about 15 acres.

Our equipment included a hatchet to place in the ground, to give a place for the vertical post to sit on (our Professor probably did not want us leaving wood stakes in the pasture). The vertical post had height marks on it because we also surveyed

for elevation changes. We had a tripod and a manual transit (computerized surveying equipment was not invented yet). Instead of using steel chain like the Buck party, we used a steel tape with measurements marked on it.

Except for the steel tape, we basically used the same equipment as the Nelson Buck party. We recorded all of our readings on paper during the three hour surveying class. We then went home and used trigonometry to calculate the spatial coordinates of all the points, as well as the area.

The one thing we learned was that a relatively small error in our measurements could make a major difference in our final results.

Author's Background in Early Nebraska History

The author has researched and written over 25 local history books as well as 300 newspaper articles. All of this material is focused on Livingston County, Illinois, history.

The author has previously researched four Livingston County gentleman that had ties to Nebraska. All four men likely knew Nelson Buck.

William Stackpole traveled from Peoria, Illinois, across Nebraska in 1849 as part of the 1848 California Gold Rush. He was later a real estate developer in Fairbury and may have hired Nelson Buck to survey some of his properties. Stackpole kept a diary and described all the unique landscape features he experienced in western Nebraska. The title of this book is ***William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields.***

An early Pontiac citizen was Judge Henry Jones. He was the leader of three groups of men that made the journey from Pontiac to the California gold fields. It is extremely likely that Judge Henry Jones knew Nelson Buck in Pontiac. Judge Jones eventually moved to California. The title of the book that has more details about these expeditions is ***The Story of the Jones House in Pontiac, Illinois***.

Andrew J. Cropsey was a pioneer settler and real estate developer in Fairbury and Cropsey, Illinois. Mr. Cropsey organized a military unit which he led in the Civil War. After the war, Mr. Cropsey moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and became a major real estate developer there. H. B. McGregor, one of the two Pontiac boys that survived the Nelson Buck expedition, ran into Mr. Cropsey in Lincoln, Nebraska, as they traveled from Pontiac to Nebraska.

Judge Woodford McDowell was a pioneer lawyer and judge in the Fairbury area. In about 1868, Judge McDowell and his brother rode on horseback through southeastern Nebraska to try to figure out where to buy land and form a new town. Judge McDowell founded Fairbury, Nebraska in 1869, the same year as the Nelson Buck party. Judge McDowell named his new town in Nebraska after his home town in Illinois. The title of the book that also covers the history of Fairbury, Nebraska, is titled ***The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois.***

The author is not an expert on early Nebraska history, but does have some exposure because of the four men noted above.

Book Font

This book is written in Times New Roman with a 12 point font size. This relatively large font size makes all parts of the book easy to read.

Chronological Chapters

This book is designed in chronological order to make it easier to follow the story of Nelson buck and his surveying party.

CHAPTER 2

The Buck Family Comes to America in 1635

The ancestors of Nelson Buck trace back to William Langdon Buck (1585-1658). He was born in Droitwich, England, and died in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Someone on Ancestry.com researched and wrote a history of the initial emigration of the Buck family to America. A copy of this history is shown below.

> "Rev. Richard Buck of the Church of England, a resident of London, studied at Oxford, was the first of the name to arrive in America. He came over in the spring of 1609 with Capt. Chris Newport, Sir Thomas Gates and George Somers with five ships and four pinnaces to succor the suffering of Virginia Colony at Jamestown, founded in 1607.
>
> They were in the ship 'Sea Venture' and encountering a heavy storm were all stranded and wrecked on the reefs of the Bermudas and after nine months of perils and sufferings in constructing two other ships out of their timbers and the surrounding cedars on the island finally set sail and reached Jamestown on the 24th day of May, 1610, just in time to check the abandonment of the colony, and the meeting of Lord Delaware in a later ship bringing supplies and ammunition coming up the Chesapeake on the 9th of June, 1610, as they were about departing for Newfoundland despairing of relief, with the hopes of falling in and returning to England with some whaler.
>
> Many of them had died, and among the number the Rev. Robert Hunt, who came in 1607 with Capt. John Smith and Governor Wingfield in the first settlement at Jamestown and was succeeded by Rev. Richard Buck who preached the first sermon in a log church under a bark and sod roof within the limits of the United States June 10th 1610, and was the second preacher and rector of the church there until his death in 1624.
>
> He undoubtedly was present and assisted the Rev. Alexander Whittaker, the Bishop, at the christening and marriage of the Indian Princess, Pocahontas, to John Rolfe in April 1613 and 1614, in the little church at Jamestown. She was only 18, being born about 1595, and died in England March 21st, 1617, at about 21 years of age.
>
> William Buck, age 50 and son Roger, age 18, plow-rites (makes or manufacturers of plows) from London in ship 'Increase,' Robert Lea, Master, April 15, 1635, were the next to arrive of which we have any definitive account and they are the ones from which our and many branches of the family are supposed to take their rise in this country.
>
> Whether they fled from the oppressive measures of the government or the persecutions of the Puritans or to seek their fortunes in a new world is not known, or to just what family in England they belonged, but it is very

significant that the surname correspond in both lines there and here with locality and date conforming, the inference is quite conclusive as to who they were.

That other sons and brothers came late on in other ships during the same year and that they all came honorably with their passports is pretty certain from the Original Lists of Emigrants, 1600 to 1700, by J.C. Hotten, London, 1974, page 65.

Having taken the oath of allegiance and supremacy, as also being comfortable to the government and discipline of the Church of England, whereof they brought testimony, pr cut from ye Justices and ministers, where their abodes have lately been.

These parties expressed are hereby transported from London' of Bucks, William, age 50, and son Roger, 18, plow-rites, embarked 5th April 1635, in ship 'Increase' Robert Lea Master, for New England.

Also of Bucks, Thomas, age 17, in ship 'George' from Gravesend, Jo Severance Master, to Virginia 21st Aug. 1635; Isaac, age 23, in ship 'Amitee,' George Downs, Master, to St. Christopher, October 13, 1634; Richard, age 24 in ship 'Expedition' to Barbados, 25th of Nov., 1635; Francis, age 20 in ship 'Falcon' to Barbados, December 19, 1635, and Christian, age 25, in ship 'Blessing', John Leicester, Master, to New England, July 13, 1634. Buck History and Genealogy Vol. 1, pp. 39-40.

One Samuel is the head of a large line in Portland, CT, and one James at New Milford, of whom Emanuel Buck of Wethersfield is claimed as the progenitor.

One Isaac, as well as William and Roger, are heads of the Massachusetts line of which Col. John, or Jonathan, claim descent, as founders of a large colony at Bucksport, Maine, all of whose ancestry is of the New England stock of Bucks. These brothers or sons of brothers or cousins, all came here about the same time or during the same year.

Buck Family Tree

Using data from Ancestry.com, the Buck family tree is shown below. The first entry is the first Buck to emigrate from England to America.

William Langdon Buck (1585-1658)
Margaret Grace Goode Neave (1585-1657)

Emanuel (Enoch) Buck (1623-1706)
Sarah Riley (Ryley) (1625-1657)

Ezekiel Buck (1650-1713)
Rachel Beebe (1654-1713)

Enoch W. Buck (1683-1770)
Mary Beebe (1699-1769)

William S. Buck (1723-1799)
Deborah Farrand (1721-1785)

Sergeant Elijah Buck Sr. (1749-1830)
Margaret H. Foster (1750-1824)

Aholiab Buck (1776-1855)
Annie A. Drake (1778-1861)

Aholiab and Annie Buck were the parents of Nelson Buck.

Both William S. Buck (1723-1799) and his son Sergeant Elija Buck Sr. (1749-1830) fought in the Revolutionary War.

Unusual First Name

Aholiab is a rather unusual first name. In the Bible, Aholiab was the son of Ahisamakh, of the tribe of Dan, worked under Bezalel as the deputy architect of the Tabernacle and the implements which it housed, including the Ark of the Covenant. He is described in Exodus 38:23 as a master of carpentry, weaving, and embroidery.

Aholiab and Annie Buck

Aholiab Buck was born in 1776 in Wyoming Valley in Luzerne County in Pennsylvania. Annie A. Drake was born in 1778 in Goshen, New York. They married in 1798 in Big Flats, New York. Aholiab was 24 and Annie was 20 when they married. They had 10 ten children.

Nelson Buck Born in 1808

Nelson Buck, son of Aholiab and Annie Buck was born on April 10, 1808, in Chemung County, New York.

Aholiab Buck in 1810 U.S. Census

Unfortunately, this Census does not give names of the household members. The Aholiab Buck family lived in Cayuga County, New York.

Name	**Shihab Buck**
Residence Date	6 Aug 1810
Residence Place	Mentz, Cayuga, New York, USA
Free White Persons - Males - Under 10	1
Free White Persons - Males - 16 thru 25	1
Free White Persons - Males - 26 thru 44	2
Free White Persons - Females - Under 10	1
Free White Persons - Females - 26 thru 44	1
Number of Household Members Under 16	2
Number of Household Members Over 25	3
Number of Household Members	6

Aholiab Buck in 1820 U.S. Census

Unfortunately, this Census does not give names of the household members. The family lived in Cayuga County, New York.

Name	**Aholiab Buck**
Enumeration Date	7 Aug 1820
Home in 1820 (City, County, State)	Mentz, Cayuga, New York, USA
Free White Persons - Males - Under 10	4
Free White Persons - Males - 10 thru 15	1
Free White Persons - Males - 16 thru 25	1
Free White Persons - Males - 26 thru 44	1
Free White Persons - Females - 16 thru 25	2
Free White Persons - Females - 26 thru 44	1
Number of Persons - Engaged in Agriculture	3
Free White Persons - Under 16	5
Free White Persons - Over 25	2
Total Free White Persons	10
Total All Persons - White, Slaves, Colored, Other	10

Aholiab Buck in 1830 U.S. Census

Unfortunately, this Census does not give names of the household members. The family lived in Cayuga County, New York.

Name	**Aholist Back**
Home in 1830 (City, County, State)	Mentz, Cayuga, New York
Free White Persons - Males - 10 thru 14	1
Free White Persons - Males - 15 thru 19	3
Free White Persons - Males - 20 thru 29	1
Free White Persons - Males - 50 thru 59	1
Free White Persons - Females - 5 thru 9	1
Free White Persons - Females - 50 thru 59	1
Free White Persons - Under 20	5
Free White Persons - 20 thru 49	1
Total Free White Persons	8
Total - All Persons (Free White, Slaves, Free Colored)	8

Family Tree of Aholiab Buck and Annie Drake

Using data from Ancestry.com, the children of Aholiab and Annie Buck are shown below.

Child #	Name	Spouse #1	Spouse #2	Spouse #3
1	Abigail Buck (1803-1885)	Jacob Eaman (1805-1895)		
2	Margaret Buck (1805-1905)			
3	Nelson Buck (1808-1869)	Fidelia Wethey (1814-1833)	Annis Knapp (1812-1844)	Maria Tracy (1812-1909)
4	Charles A. Buck Sr. (1810-1884)	Eunice Stewart (1821-1905)		
5	Aaron K. Buck (1812-1912)			
6	John Foster Buck (1815-1901)	Mary Ann Schryder (1820-1910)		
7	Stephen D. Buck (1817-1899)			
8	Willard P. Buck (1833-1909)			
9	Corilla V. Buck (1834-unknown)			

Emigration of Aholiab Buck Family to Peoria County in 1831-1832

One of the history books of Peoria County, Illinois, is ***The History of Peoria County, Illinois***. It was published by Johnson and Company, 1880. This book has the following entry in the Hollis Township section of the book.

> **BUCK STEPHEN D.** farmer and stock raiser, Sec. 6, P. O. Harker's Corners, is the Son of Aholiab and Annis (Drake) Buck. His father was born in Pennsylvania, but immigrated with his parents when a boy to Cayuga county, N. Y., and his mother a native of Orange county, N. Y.; were married in l801, and raised a family of seven children, five of which lived to adult age. They came to Peoria county in the Fall of 1831, and settled on Sec. 6, Hollis township, where they remained until their deaths. Father died in 1855 at the age of seventy-nine, and his mother in 1860 at the age of eighty-three.
>
> Mr. Buck, the youngest of the family, was born in Cayuga County, N, Y., on the 6th day of October, 1817, and came to this county with his parents when about fourteen years of age, and has resided on or near where they first located since.
>
> He married Miss Mary, daughter of James Smith, of Kentucky, born June 22, 1820. They were blessed by three boys and one girl —James A., Margaret A., Wm. J. and John Huston. Has 360 acres of land, all under good cultivation, elegantly improved, and valued at $15,000. Has held several local offices in the township. His father was on the first grand jury in the county. Had one son in the army in the 151st I. V. I.

This entry states that Aholiab and Annis Buck arrived in Peoria County in the Fall of 1831.

Another Book Reporting that Aholiab Buck Moved to Peoria County in 1832

In 1789, a history book was published about Cayuga County, New York. The title is the ***History of Cayuga County, New York, 1789-1879*** by Eliot G. Storke.

This book has several entries about the Buck family in Cayuga County. Some of these entries are shown below.

> John C. Dixon, proprietor of the flouring and grist-mill at Port Byron, commenced business in the fall of 1865, in company with J. V. White, the present Supervisor (1879) of Mentz, under the firm

name of Dixon & White. February 17th, 1875, the mill, which was a wooden structure, erected in 1845, was burned, and in that year Mr. Dixon bought Mr. White's interest and rebuilt on the same site. The present mill, which is also built of wood, is forty by sixty feet, three and one-half stories high, and supplied with all the modern improvements. It is reputed to be the finest mill in this section of the country. It contains four run of stones and is capable of grinding 100 barrels of flour per day in addition to custom work, which averages from 25,000 to 30,000 bushels of grain annually. The motive power is furnished by water from the creek, over a fall of eight feet.

The first mill on this site was built about 1814 or '15, by Aaron Knapp, the site and ten acres of land being donated for that purpose by Elijah and Aholiab Buck. The present mill is the fourth one on this site, three having been destroyed by fire. A saw-mill built on this site by Knapp about the same time stood until it decayed. These were the first mills in the town.

Port Byron was for many years, known as Bucksville, which name it derived from the Buck family, who were early settlers here and contributed largely to its growth and prosperity. The present name was assumed in 1832.

In the spring of 1798, Aholiab Buck, a native of Pennsylvania, moved in from Big Flats, Chemung county, and located on River street, opposite the residence of Samuel N. Dougherty, in the village of Port Byron. He was the first settler in the corporate limits of the village. He built a log cabin that season and cleared a little land, when he went home and married Annis Drake, a native of Goshen, N. Y., with whom he returned the same Fall, in company with his brother, Elijah Buck, and the latter's wife and daughter Sarah.

Elijah had previously bought lot 73 of a soldier who served in the Revolutionary war. Both families lived in the log house till its destruction by fire the same fall, (a calamity by which they lost everything but the clothes on their backs,) when they removed to the house of Philip King, about three-fourths of a mile distant, where they remained till other houses were built.

The Messrs. Buck built separate houses that fall. Aholiab's stood on the site of the one destroyed by fire ; and Elijah's near the house now occupied by Mr. Henry Vosburgh. The town was then heavily timbered, principally with beech and maple, with some basswood,

> oak, white wood and hemlock. Game and fish were plentiful, yet bread stuffs and other edibles were scarce.
>
> Bears and wolves were numerous and a source of much annoyance. Daniel Drake Buck relates that on one occasion when his uncle Aholiab was away from home his aunt shot and killed a bear which was disturbing the pig pen in the night. This was about 1805 or '06. The Messrs. Buck had two guns, one of which they left loaded, to be used in case of emergency. The heroine of this story was a resolute woman, a good sample of the women who undertook pioneer life. Aholiab Buck removed to Illinois in 1832.

This book reported the Aholiab Buck family moved from Cayuga County, New York, to Peoria County in 1832.

First Marriage of Nelson Buck in 1832

Nelson Buck married Fidelia Wethey in 1832 in Cayuga County, New York. Nelson was 24 and Fidelia was 18 when they married. Her parents were Abel Wethey (1790-1836) and Elizabeth Seymour (1791-1865).

Nelson and Fidelia Buck had a child they named Oliver Perry Buck, on July 3, 1832, in Port Byron in Cayuga County in New York.

Death of Nelson Buck's First Wife in 1833

Unfortunately, Fidelia Buck died in Cayuga County, New York on April 26, 1833. She was only 18 years of age when she died. She had a grave stone and she was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Port Byron, New York.

Who Was the Mother of Clarissa Buck?

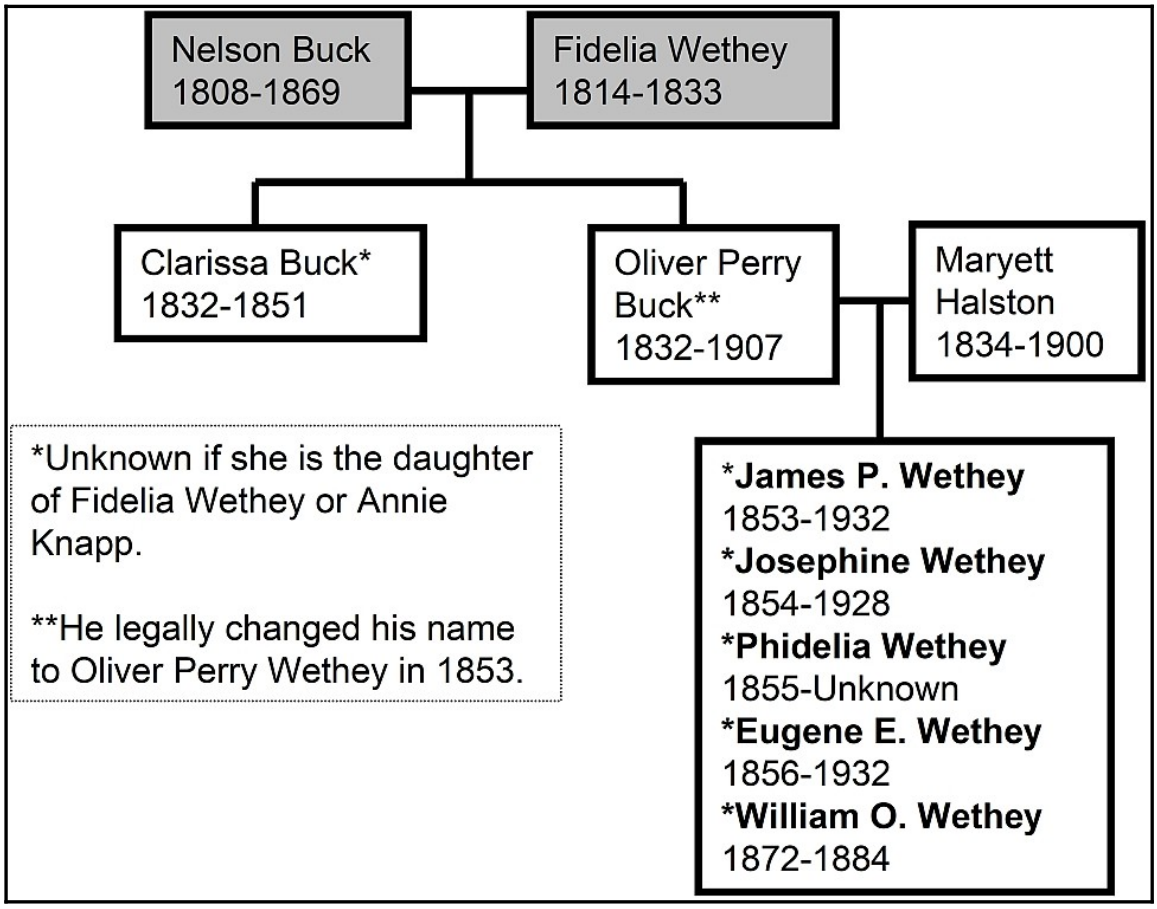
Ancestry.com records indicate that Nelson Buck had a daughter named Clarissa Buck. Her grave stone in Pontiac's Southside Cemetery indicates she was born in 1832 and she died in 1851. Records indicate she was born in Illinois, not in New York.

She may have been the daughter of Fidelia Wethey. It is also possible her mother was the second wife of Nelson Buck, Annis Knapp.

Clarissa Buck is buried in the same location as Cordelia Buck (1839-1919), wife of Charles E. Watson (1833-1887).

At this time, the mother of Cordelia Buck remains a mystery.

Family Tree of Nelson Buck and His First Wife



What Happened to the First Son of Henry Buck?

When the first wife of Henry Buck died, his son, Oliver Perry Buck, would have been only about one year old.

Data in Ancestry.com indicates that Oliver P. Buck was raised by his grandparents, Abel Wethey (1790-1836) and Elizabeth Seymour (1791-1865).

On July 21, 1853, in Chapter 640, Laws of New York, 76th Session, page 1223, the name of Oliver P. Buck is changed to Oliver P. Withey. He was 21 years of age when he legally changed his name.

Oliver Perry Buck married Maryett Halson (1834-1900) and they had five children.

Often, an orphan raised by his grandparents, does not develop into a well-adjusted adult. This appears to be the case with Oliver P. Buck. I found a copy of this newspaper article, but I forgot to document the date and newspaper name. If Oliver P. Buck was 47 years of age when it occurred, it was published around 1879. He had changed his name to Oliver P. Wethey at this point. A copy of the article is shown below.

A HUMAN TARGET
A SON USES HIS FATHER FOR PISTOL PRACTICE

Eugene Wethey of Port Byron Fires Four Bullets Into His Father's Body

The "dark and bloody ground" of Cayuga is the scene of another deed which may prove a murder. On Wednesday afternoon Eugene Wethey, a young man, fired four bullets into his father's body. The shooting occurred on a farm one and a half miles north of the village of Port Byron, occupied by the Wetheys.

It seems that about 4 o'clock, the father, aged 47, came home from the village and had scarcely entered the door when he remarked that "the boy had a butcher knife and intended to kill him with it."

Eugene, his mother and his two sisters, Josephine age ?9 and Fidelia age ?6 were present. James, another brother, was absent. Eugene retorted that it was a lie.

This incensed the old man, who drew a revolver and pointed it at Eugene. Eugene ran into the pantry. The father went into a bed-room and secured a shotgun. He returned, and cocking the weapon, started for the pantry.

Josephine seized the gun by the barrel. He ordered her to release the hold, but she refused and he threatened to shoot her. Eugene came out from the pantry to rescue Josephine. At his appearance, the old man fired. The shot passed Eugene and lodged in the wall.

The father then drew his revolver, but before he could fire, Eugene leveled his revolver at him and shot four bullets into his body. One bullet lodged in the left shoulder and three in the right side. The latter were all within a space of five inches from the heart.

Strange to relate, the old man walked a quarter of a mile, to the residence of his uncle, Porter Wethey, who took him to Port Byron, where Dr. Swift dressed his wounds. The wounded man was subsequently taken to Christian's Hotel, a small country tavern near the Central Hudson depot, where he still lies.

After the shooting Eugene, the son, who is about twenty one years of age, proceeded to the village and surrendered to the constable. The news of the affair spread rapidly and in a short time a crowd collected. Threats were made to lynch young Wethey, and for the prisoner's safety, he was removed that night at ten o'clock to Auburn and lodged in the county jail, where he is now confined.

In Eugene's pocket were found percussion caps and cartridges, which show that the young man was familiar with the use of firearms. It is stated that the people are greatly incensed against Eugene. The family has a reputation for domestic broils.

The father is said to have a very bad temper, which he displays at the most trivial occasion. It is not known that he is addicted to drink, and it is stated that he was perfectly sober at the time of the shooting.

Eugene Wethey, who made his father's body a target for pistol practice, is a tall, slender young man, slightly round shouldered, with light hair and eyes. He is of fair intelligence, but shows no particular keenness. The farm where the shooting took place is owned by the old man and consists of nearly six acres.

At first it was thought that Wethey's wounds would prove fatal, but it now looks as though the old man might recover. Last night he was quite comfortable and the attending physician expressed hopes of his recovery.

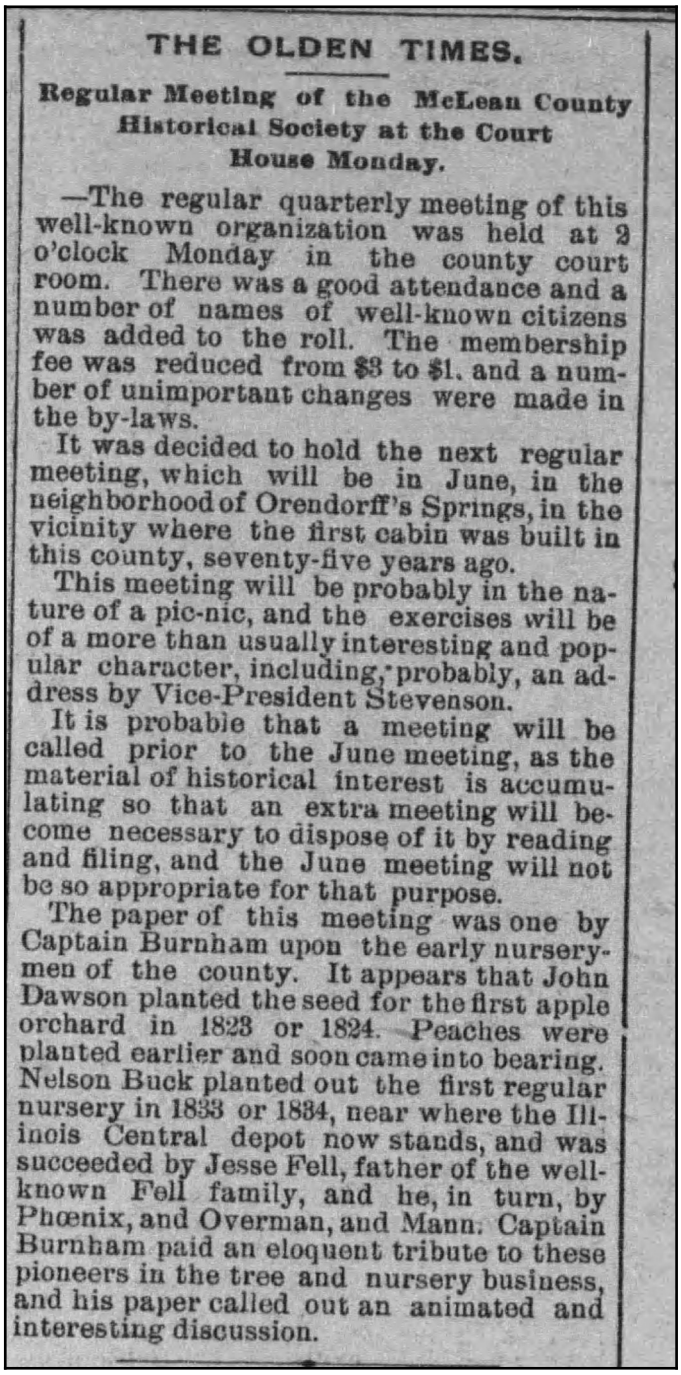
> It is related that on four occasions the old man has shot at his sons and once while his wife was sick, dragged her from bed in a fit of passion.
>
> Wethey's temper, it seems, has caused him much trouble. The family does not bear the best reputation for its peaceful relations. Eugene claims that if his father should die he could prove by his mother and sisters that he shot him in self defense."

Oliver P. Buck [Wethey] died in 1907. It is not known if Nelson Buck ever met his son after Nelson moved to Illinois.

CHAPTER 3

1833

1897 Pantagraph Article About Nelson Buck Planting Orchard in 1833 in Bloomington



THE OLDEN TIMES.

Regular Meeting of the McLean County Historical Society at the Court House Monday.

—The regular quarterly meeting of this well-known organization was held at 2 o'clock Monday in the county court room. There was a good attendance and a number of names of well-known citizens was added to the roll. The membership fee was reduced from $3 to $1, and a number of unimportant changes were made in the by-laws.

It was decided to hold the next regular meeting, which will be in June, in the neighborhood of Orendorff's Springs, in the vicinity where the first cabin was built in this county, seventy-five years ago.

This meeting will be probably in the nature of a pic-nic, and the exercises will be of a more than usually interesting and popular character, including, probably, an address by Vice-President Stevenson.

It is probable that a meeting will be called prior to the June meeting, as the material of historical interest is accumulating so that an extra meeting will become necessary to dispose of it by reading and filing, and the June meeting will not be so appropriate for that purpose.

The paper of this meeting was one by Captain Burnham upon the early nurserymen of the county. It appears that John Dawson planted the seed for the first apple orchard in 1823 or 1824. Peaches were planted earlier and soon came into bearing. Nelson Buck planted out the first regular nursery in 1833 or 1834, near where the Illinois Central depot now stands, and was succeeded by Jesse Fell, father of the well-known Fell family, and he, in turn, by Phœnix, and Overman, and Mann. Captain Burnham paid an eloquent tribute to these pioneers in the tree and nursery business, and his paper called out an animated and interesting discussion.

Abe Lincoln's Brief Employment as a Surveyor in 1833-1834

Like Nelson Buck, Abraham Lincoln was also a surveyor. Lincoln primarily surveyed in Sangamon County, Illinois. Lincoln was only a surveyor for about two years.

In 1926, Carl Sandburg wrote a short story about Lincoln's short career as a surveyor and a copy is published on the website SurveyHistory.Org and is titled ***Lincoln the Surveyor.*** A copy of his short article is shown below.

> In the fall of 1833 came Abraham Lincoln's entry into the most highly technical and responsible work he had known. Writing of it later, he said, "The Surveyor of Sangamon [County] offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within his part of the county. He accepted, procured a compass and chain, studied Flint, and Gibson a little, and went at it. This procured bread and kept soul and body together." There were farm sections, roads and towns needing their boundary lines marked clear and beyond doubt on maps - more than the county surveyor, John Calhoun, could handle. On the suggestion of Pollard Simmons, a farmer and Democratic politician living near New Salem, Calhoun, a Jackson Democrat, appointed Lincoln, who went 18 miles to Springfield to make sure he wasn't tied up politically and could speak as he pleased.
>
> Then for six weeks, daytime and often all of nighttime, he had his head deep in Gibson's ***Theory and Practice of Surveying*** and Flint's ***Treatise on Geometry, Trigonometry and Rectangular Surveying***. From decimal fractions one book ran on onto logarithms, the use of mathematical instruments, operating the chain, circumferentor, surveying by intersections, changing the scale of maps, leveling, methods for mensuration of areas.
>
> Many nights, said Mentor Graham's daughter, she woke at midnight to see Lincoln and her father by the fire, figuring and explaining, her mother sometimes bringing fresh firewood for better lighting. On some nights he worked alone till daylight and it wore him down. He was fagged, and friends said he looked like a hard drinker after a two weeks' spree. Good people said, "You're killing yourself."

In six weeks, however, he had mastered his books, and Calhoun put him to work on the north end of Sangamon County. The open air and sun helped as he worked in the field and timberland with compass and measurements. His pay was $2.50 for "establishing" a quarter section of land, $2.00 for a half-quarter, 25 cents to 37½ cents for small town lots. He surveyed the towns of Petersburg, Bath, New Boston, Albany, Huron, and others. He surveyed roads, school sections, pieces of farm land from four-acre plots to 160-acre farms. His surveys became known for care and accuracy and he was called on to settle boundary disputes. In Petersburg, however, he laid out one street crooked. Running it straight and regular, it would have put the house of Jemima Elmore and her family into the street. Lincoln knew her to be working a small farm with her children and she was the widow of Private Travice Elmore, honorable in service in Lincoln's company in the Black Hawk War.

For his surveying trips he had bought a horse, saddle and bridle from William Watkins for $57.886, and for nonpayment Watkins on April 26, 1834, got judgment in court and levied on Lincoln's personal possessions. It looked as though he would lose his surveying instruments. Then Bill Green showed up and turned in a horse on the Watkins judgment - and James Short came from Sand Ridge to the auction Lincoln was too sad to attend and bid in the saddle, bridle, compass and other surveying instruments. When Short brought them to Lincoln it hit him as another surprise in his young life. Short liked Lincoln as a serious student, a pleasant joker, and said that on the farm "he husks two loads of corn to my one."'

- Carl Sandburg, ***Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years*** (New York, 1926), p. 44-46.

Other articles about Lincoln state that because Lincoln practiced a couple of years as a surveyor, he was often sought after for assistance in court cases involving land boundary disputes.

Because Lincoln surveyed in Sangamon County and Buck surveyed in Peoria, McLean, and Livingston Counties, it is unlikely they met each other in the 1833 to 1834 era as fellow surveyors.

History of Illinois Surveying in Era of Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Buck

There is a website that has a good history of early surveying in Illinois. This website can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/yjpxvn8a. A copy of the early surveying history is shown below.

https://landsurveyors.pro/faq/land-surveying-history/

Brief History of Illinois Land Surveying

The Beginning of the U.S. Public Land System

A Chronological History of Surveying in Illinois

It is important for the would-be-surveyor and the experienced practitioner to fully comprehend the fact that present survey practices have roots deeply implanted in history dating back 6000 years to the pyramids of ancient Egypt, and possibly beyond that. The oldest map recovered, consisting of scratches in an Assyrian tablet, dates back 5000 years.

Many centuries of refinement of equipment and techniques had passed by the time the art of surveying reached the Illinois Territory. It was a rugged party of pioneers who first crossed the Wabash with their Rittenhouse compasses and Gunter's chains to stake out the virgin forests and prairies of Illinois. Through the hardships of Indians, snow, hunger, prairie grass, insects, and low pay, these surveyors established the land that was soon to become the 21st State of the Union. The corners that these men established still control the location of present survey lines. This could be considered a tribute to these hardy individuals. Surveyors must study the past to gather insight into the future.

Illinois is a part of the United States Public Land Survey System, also known as the Rectangular System. It is in use in thirty of the fifty United States. Those states that do not use it include the thirteen original colonies, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, Hawaii, and other Eastern states except Florida.

There are 35 Principal Meridians and 32 Base Lines in use in the Rectangular System. Most of these locations are arbitrary or based on some natural features such as a fork in a river. Of these 35 Principal Meridians, all but the first six are named such as the Salt

Lake Meridian or the Black Hills Meridian. The first six are numbered, including the three that govern surveys in Illinois, the Second, Third, and Fourth Meridian.

The Second Principal Meridian, located in Indiana, controls approximately 10% of the Eastern part of Illinois. The Third Principal Meridian, located in South-central Illinois, governs roughly 60% of Illinois. The Fourth Principal Meridian controls the remaining 30% of the northwest portion of Illinois.

According to the latest Manual of surveying Instructions printed in 1973 by the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, the latitude and Longitude of the initial point, or the intersection of the Principal Meridians and their baselines are as follows:

Latitude Longitude

Second P.M. 38-28'-14" 86-27'-21"
Third P.M. 38-28'-27" 89-08'-54"
Fourth P.M. 40-00'-50" 90-27'-11"

The actual subdividing of Illinois land under the Rectangular System was done during the years 1805 to 1855, but mostly between 1815 and 1835. During this time, due to rapid settlement and the urgent need for money by the new government, it was necessary to complete surveys as quickly as possible. This fact, along with little field supervision and a contract system that, in effect, rewarded the Surveyor for the speed with which the lines were run, may have resulted in a significant amount of error in the surveys in Illinois. There was little concern for this due to the low value of land during this period, but with present land values, today's practitioners must take into consideration these facts when he follows in the footsteps of these early Surveyors.

There were many ordinances and instructions to Surveyors that governed the surveying of lands in Illinois. For a more complete analysis of these items, it would be advisable to consult Federal Instructions for Surveys of the Public Lands From 1785-1843 by Joe Webber, or Land Survey Systems by John McEntyre.

The Beginning of the U.S. Public Land System

With vast lands opening up in the West, the Continental Congress had to develop a plan for the orderly sale of individual tracts to the public. In 1784 a committee, headed by Thomas Jefferson, developed a plan for dividing this public land into rectangles. In 1785 a second committee was formed with one member from each state, which amended the first plan and submitted it to the Continental Congress for its approval.

On May 20, 1785, the Continental Congress approved the first Land Ordinance. Under the terms of the 1785 Land Ordinance, Congress was to appoint one Surveyor from each state to serve under the direction of the Geographer of the United States.

The basic plan called for by Jefferson's committee developed three theories: the principle of "survey before settlement"; the principal of a mathematically designed plan to be followed throughout the entire public domain area; and the creation of a standard land unit, the section of uniform shape and area and with boundaries physically marked on the ground.

The 1785 Land Ordinance also included the provision that Section 16 in each Township would be set aside for the maintenance of public schools.

The 1785 Ordinance called for the surveying of the public lands to begin on the River Ohio at a point that should be found to be due North from the Western terminus of a line which has been run as the Southern boundary of the State of Pennsylvania". Four boundary surveyors - David Rittenhouse, Andrew Porter, Andrew Ellicott, and Joseph Neville established this point on August 20, 1785.

Thomas Hutchins, who was appointed the Geographer of the United States in July of 1781 and was a major contributor to Jefferson's committee, was chosen to personally direct the surveys under the 1785 Land Ordinance. Of the 13 surveyors who were to aid Hutchins, only 8 reported and they were: Edward Dowse from New Hampshire; Benjamin Tupper from Massachusetts; Isaac Sherman from Connecticut; Absalom Martin from New Jersey; William Morris from New York; Alexander Parker from Virginia; James Simpson from Maryland; and Robert Johnson from Georgia. These 8, plus Thomas Hutchins and 30 helpers met at the mouth of Little Beaver Creek.

On the last day of September 1785, starting at the initial point previously established, Hutchins ran the East-West latitude Line known as the "Geographer's Line" from which the surveys of the "Seven Ranges" began.

The surveyors drew lots and Absalom Martin drew #1 and in August 1786, 6 miles due West of the point of beginning, he started South to begin the survey of the first range.
Under the Land Ordinance of 1785 only the corners of the townships were surveyed and the section lines were added on paper.

The survey of the Seven Ranges served many purposes. It influenced the methods used in later surveys; served as a training ground for surveyors; and provided map information and land evaluation.

On May 18, 1796, Congress passed another Land Ordinance that amended and superseded the Act of 1785. This act provided for "The sale of the lands of the United States in the territory North-West of the River Ohio and above the mouth of the Kentucky River". The significant provisions of this Act included:

1.The system of numbering sections was changed to the system now in use.
2.Pay for survey work was raised from $2 to $3/mile of the line for all expenses except escort.
3.Section lines were marked at 2-mile intervals.
4.The Post of Surveyor General was established at a pay rate of $2000/year.

On October 1, 1796, Washington appointed Rufus Putnam as the first Surveyor-General of the United States and he served for the next seven years. He was the author of the present numbering system and placed the excess and deficiency in the North and West tiers. There were two acts passed by Congress in the year 1800. The most significant principle established by March 1, 1800, Act was that the corner set under regulations by a surveyor in the field is a true corner, even if later surveys indicate that it was placed incorrectly.

The Act of May 10, 1800, provided for the subdivision of townships into Half Sections of 320 acres each. It also made provisions for placing all excess or deficiency of measurement in the North mile and the West 1/2 mile in each township. In the

year 1803 Jared Mansfield replaced Rufus Putnam as Surveyor General. There is good evidence that Jared Mansfield issued fairly detailed instructions to his deputies in 1804 when he contemplated the survey of the Vincennes tract in Indiana. Unfortunately, Mansfield did not sign or date the instructions.

It is known that in 1804 he introduced the plan of intersecting Meridians and Baselines, which provided a convenient basis for township identification by numbering them. As time passed it became obvious that sections needed to be subdivided into yet smaller units. This was accomplished by Congress in the Act of February 11, 1805, which provided for the subdivision of sections into Quarter Sections. In 1812 Congress established the General Land Office (GLO) as a Bureau of the Treasury Department "To superintend, execute, and perform all such Acts respecting the public lands".

Edward Tiffin, a former surveyor, was chosen as the first Commissioner of the GLO. Tiffin immediately set about planning and developing a more efficient system of land management. Josiah Meigs, who had worked under Thomas Hutchins on the survey of the Seven Ranges, was appointed Surveyor-General of all the public lands East of the Mississippi River when Mansfield resigned the office.

A Chronological History of Surveying in Illinois

1800 - 1809

In late summer of 1802 Thomas Freeman began surveying land in the vicinity of Vincennes, Indiana after Congressional approval in May of that year. This area, known as the Vincennes Tract included part of the Illinois Territory and marked the beginning of surveying in Illinois. Upon completion of the boundary lines and corners, Surveyor General Jared Mansfield chose Ebenezer Buckingham, Jr. to layout the control lines for the surveys within the Vincennes Tract. Ebenezer Buckingham began his work in 1804 by running a baseline East from a starting point 67.5 miles into Illinois Territory at the S.W. corner of the Vincennes Tract.

Later he ran a North-South control line which became the second Principal Meridian. Once these control lines were in, it was possible for Thomas Freeman to begin subdividing the Vincennes Tract into townships and sections. In mid-1805 Jared Mansfield, Surveyor-General of the United States, authorized Deputy Surveyor William Rector to extend survey work across the

Wabash to the Mississippi River. On October 24, 1805, Rector reached the Mississippi tying the surveys to be controlled by the Third Principal Meridian with the same baseline as those of the Second Principal Meridian.

1810 - 1819

After the creation of the General Land Office and with a war against Great Britain imminent, Congress established three bounty lands to encourage military enlistment. One of these military districts was located in Illinois Territory between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. These areas had to be surveyed before they could be opened to the soldiers returning from war. Commissioner Tiffin of the GLO established a District Land Office in Kaskaskia, Illinois to handle the distribution of lands within Illinois.

In 1814 an exchange of jobs took place. Josiah Meigs became the second Commissioner of the GLO and Edward Tiffin became the Surveyor-General of Territories East of the Mississippi, a position he held for 15 years.

As the Surveyor-General, Edward Tiffin was very active in establishing policies to be followed in surveying the public lands. Although previous Surveyor Generals had issued instructions by letter or word, it was not until July 26, 1815, that Edward Tiffin issued the first written instructions. Late in 1815, it became apparent that the Third Principal Meridian could not be extended correctly to the Illinois River. Therefore, the Fourth Principal Meridian was called for to commence at the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

By 1817 this line had been extended North to the line between Townships 14 and 15 North. Two standard lines were run East and West from the 4th P.M. The concept of standard lines or "Lines of Corrections" was conceived by Edward Tiffin to resolve the paradoxical requirement set forth by Congress that the townships were to have sides running in the Cardinal directions, and that they were to be rectangular. This is an impossible situation due to the convergence of the Meridian. To solve this, Edward Tiffin instructed the Deputy Surveyors to introduce correction lines at "stated distances" North or South of the baseline. In Illinois, this was done by individual correspondence or instructions. Later in 1851, the policy was changed to Standard Parallels and Meridians at 24-mile intervals. On December 3, 1818, Illinois, with its present boundaries was admitted as the 21st State of the Union.

1820 - 1829

The Act of April 24, 1820, called for the survey and sale of Half-Quarter Sections. This change was made to allow a large number of people of limited means who had taken up land ahead of the surveys to buy land at the minimum cash price of $1.25/acre. At this time Illinois was about one quarter surveyed.

In 1821 the legislatures of the states of Indiana and Illinois ordered a survey of their common boundary. A Commissioner representing each state was appointed, and the line was run and marked with wooden posts. A large stone post on the North bank of the Wabash River marks the point where the Eastern boundary leaves the river and proceeds north. This point has a latitude of 39-20'-57.6" and longitude of 87-31'-52.9" W. By 1822 the Third Principal Meridian had been extended to the Illinois River and all of the standard lines up to Township 31N had been run. The 1820s marked a very active phase in the surveying of Illinois lands. By 1823 approximately one-half of the state had been surveyed and by 1825 nearly 3/4 of the state was surveyed, according to the annual report of the Commissioners of the General Land Office.

1830 - 1839

In 1831 and 1832 the Northern boundary of the state was surveyed and marked by Commissioners representing the United States and Illinois. This boundary, having a latitude of 42-29'-37" determined by observation, is marked with a five-ton stone, seven feet high, set on the high water-line of the Mississippi River. A 12-inch square post, nine feet long, driven into, the ground one chain from the shore of Lake Michigan marks the Eastern end of this marked line. The total length of this boundary is 144 miles 48 chains 80 links. Lucius Lyon, who was the U.S. Commissioner for the Northern boundary survey, soon afterward extended the Fourth Principal Meridian to meet this line. This required crossing the Mississippi River twice and running a large portion of the line in the State of Iowa. It was not until after 1836, at a time when a vast majority of Illinois was already surveyed, that the Burt's Solar Compass was invented. At about the same time the transit came into use, and backsights were taken to establish straight lines. Prior to this time, all courses were taken with a magnetic compass, most likely a Rittenhouse, and the needle corrected for deviation from astronomic North. In 1839, William Milburn was

confirmed into the position of Surveyor-General of the Public Lands in the states of Illinois and Missouri.

1840 - 1849

On the 1st of October 1840 William Milburn compiled a report on the status of the surveys in Illinois.

Surveyor Generals Office

Saint Louis the 1st of October 1840

The surveying districts noted in the accompanying statements B No. 1 and B No. 2 are as far as practicable, represented on this diagram, and designated by the appropriate figures and letters, corresponding to the figures and letters in said statements B No. 1 and B No. 2. The townships of said surveying districts which have been subdivided and the notes of survey returned to this office are marked with a small o, and the Townships which it is intended to subdivide with the means now available for public surveys over and above the present contracts are marked with the letter z. This will close the public surveys in the State of Illinois. The five Townships marked x were subdivided in 1838 without authority from the Surveyor General; this proceeding will either be approved or the Townships will be classed with those marked z and re-subdivided under the present appropriation. The Township lines, which have been surveyed, are drawn with black ink. Those, which have not been surveyed, are dotted. The Townships marked with the letter S have been subdivided.

William Milburn
Surveyor of the Public Lands
In the States Of Illinois and Missouri

With this report, William Milburn closed the active period of public surveys in Illinois, however the last government contract for surveying a township in Illinois was not signed until 1855.

1850 - 1859

In 1850 the Surveyor General for Illinois and Missouri published his "Manual of Instructions to U.S. Deputy Surveyors", with an appendix for the Use of County Surveyors. This was immediately recognized, without any question, as being the conclusive authority and generally adopted by the better class of surveyors in the state, that was until Judge Burt published his "key to the Solar

Compass and Surveyor's Companion". This opened up the whole subject of the proper survey and subdivision of the sections. This led to much discussion; both oral and written, finally resulting in the call for a convention on January 7, 1857. No conclusions were reached regarding the subdivision of sections, so another convention was called for on January 5, 1859, in Springfield.

After a very long and warm discussion, it was finally proposed and agreed to submit the question of the proper subdivision of a section to an able lawyer for his decision. In the selection of the attorney, the convention chose Mr. Abraham Lincoln, a practical surveyor as well as a recognized leading member of the Bar, on the principle that a good lawyer could better interpret and apply the law to a subject with which he was thoroughly conversant. Mr. Lincoln replied with the following written opinion:

> "The 11th Section of the Act of Congress, approved Feb. 11, 1805, prescribing rules for the subdivision of sections of land within the United States system of surveys, standing unrepealed in my opinion, is binding on the respective purchasers of different parts of the same section, and furnishes the true rule for surveyors in establishing lines between them. That law, being in force at the time each became a purchaser, becomes a condition of the purchase.
>
> "And by that law, I think the true rule for dividing into quarters, and interior section, or section which is not fractional, is to run straight lines through the sections from the opposite quarter-section corners, fixing the point where such straight lines cross, or intersect each other, as the middle, or center of the section.
>
> "Nearly, perhaps quite, all the original surveys are to some extent erroneous, and in some of the sections, quite so. In each of the latter, it is obvious that a more equitable mode of division than the above might be adopted; but as the error is infinitely various, perhaps no better single rule can be prescribed.

"At all events, I think the above has been prescribed by the competent authority".

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Springfield, Jan. 6 1859

Considering Abraham Lincoln's background, the conventioneers accepted his opinion and the question of subdivision of sections was settled.

A study of Illinois surveying history would not be complete without an appreciation of the conditions and the obstacles that these early surveyors had to meet and overcome. Some of these early surveyors had little formal education or experience, and though they were supervised, many had to solve their own problems in the field as instructions may take weeks to arrive. The territory they surveyed was for the most part uncut timberland and prairie grass, sometimes 6 to 8 feet in height with no convenient roads or bridges every mile. The instruments they used cannot compare in accuracy with those in use today.

The Rectangular Survey System was still in its infancy with corrections and refinements continually being made as problems arose and the early surveyors had to be aware of these. A typical survey party had to camp away from home and family for months at a time, living off supplies that had to be brought in by horse or on foot or living off the land and improvising with what could be found. Many times they faced hostile Indians and wild animals, insects, hunger, snow, and disease.

All of this he faced for pay as low as $2/mile of line, which had to include all expenses except military escort. This is well worth thinking about as we travel to our job in four-wheel drive trucks, equipped with EDM's and Theodolites, stop for lunch at a nearby restaurant, and finish the day with a cold drink back home.

Modern Surveyor’s Jargon

In the article above, EDM refers to Electronic Distance Measuring machine which measures distance electronically versus steel chains or steel tape.

A Theodolite is a surveying instrument with a rotating telescope for measuring horizontal and vertical angles.

CHAPTER 4

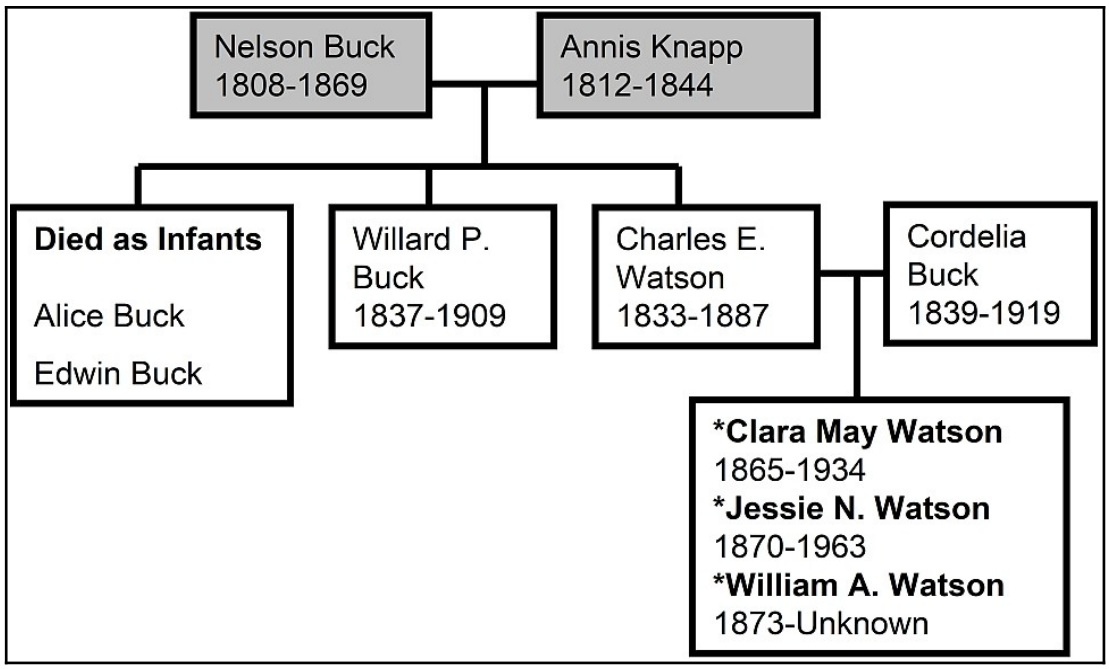
1834 to 1852

Nelson Buck Marries for a Second Time in 1834

Nelson married Annis Knapp on March 19, 1834, in Montgomery, Illinois. Nelson was 25 and Annis was 21 when they married. Her parents were Aaron Knapp (1770-1848) and Margaret Drake (1773-1812). Nelson and Annis Buck had four children. Alice Buck and Edwin Buck died as infants. Two of their children lived to be adults and included Willard P. Buck (1837-1909) and Cordelia Buck (1839-1919).

Family Tree of Nelson Buck and His Second Wife

Using data from Ancestry.com, the family tree of Nelson Buck and his second wife is shown below.



Nelson Buck Living in Peoria in 1840 Census

Although his name is not spelled correctly in the Census, it indicates he lived in Peoria, Illinois, in 1840.

Buck Family Starts to Purchase Illinois Land in 1840

Aholiab Buck bought land in Peoria County in 1840. His sons, Nelson Buck and Stephen Buck, also bought land in Peoria County per the Bureau of Land Management database.

Names	Date	Twp - Rng	Aliquots	Sec. #	County
P BARRET, RICHARD F, P BUCK, NELSON	7/10/1844	007N - 007E	NW¼	7	Peoria
P BUCK, AHOLIAB	11/3/1840	007N - 007E	W½SW¼	6	Peoria
		007N - 007E	W½NW¼	8	Peoria
P BUCK, JOHN F	11/3/1840	007N - 007E	SW¼	7	Peoria
P BUCK, NELSON	11/3/1840	007N - 007E	E½SW¼	6	Peoria
P BUCK, NELSON	11/3/1840	008N - 007E	NW¼SE¼	20	Peoria
P BUCK, NELSON	6/9/1845	011N - 009E	N½SW¼	32	Peoria
P BUCK, PETER, W BUCK, PETER	11/25/1818	011N - 009E	NE¼	19	Peoria
P BUCK, STEPHEN D	11/3/1840	007N - 007E	W½SE¼	6	Peoria
P BUCK, STEPHEN D	11/3/1840	007N - 007E	E½SE¼	6	Peoria
P BUCK, STEPHEN D	12/24/1858	007N - 007E	W½SW¼	5	Peoria

It is likely that Nelson Buck was living in Peoria in 1840 because he was buying land in that year.

Background of Maria Tracy

Maria would eventually become the 3rd and last wife of Nelson Buck in 1850.

She married Augustus Fellows (1796-1849) in New York in 1840. He was 44 and she was 28 when they married. They moved from New York to Pontiac and became one of the earliest families to settle in Pontiac.

In 1843, daughter Mary J. Fellows was born in Pontiac, but she died just five months later.

In 1844, daughter Ellen A. Fellows was born in Pontiac, but she died at the age of 6 in Pontiac.

In 1845, son Isaac E. Fellows was born in Pontiac, but died shortly after birth.

In 1849, their fourth child, Claricuse R. Fellows was born. She died shortly after birth.

Also in 1849, after losing all four of her children, her husband, Augustus Fellow, died in Pontiac at the age of 53. Maria was 47 when her first husband died. They had been married nine years.

Second Wife of Nelson Buck Dies in 1844

Annis Buck died in Homer, New York, on March 6, 1844. She was only 31 years of age when she died. Nelson Buck was 35 when his second wife died. The surviving children in the household were seven year old Willard, five year old Cordelia, and 12 year old Clarissa.

No burial location could be found for Annis Buck.

First Mention of Nelson Buck in Bloomington Pantagraph in 1848

The first mention of Nelson Buck in the Pantagraph is in the August 5, 1848, edition. The nursery advertisement is very faint, so it was redrawn in the same format.

Central Nursery.

NOW is the time for those who wish to have good fruit to purchase the trees. At this establishment there is a good assortment of apple, pear and peach trees, and a few grape roots, &c., all of which will be sold on terms to accommodate purchasers. I expect to keep a hand constantly in the nursery to attend to calls, in this line.

NELSON BUCK

March 24, 1848 **21**

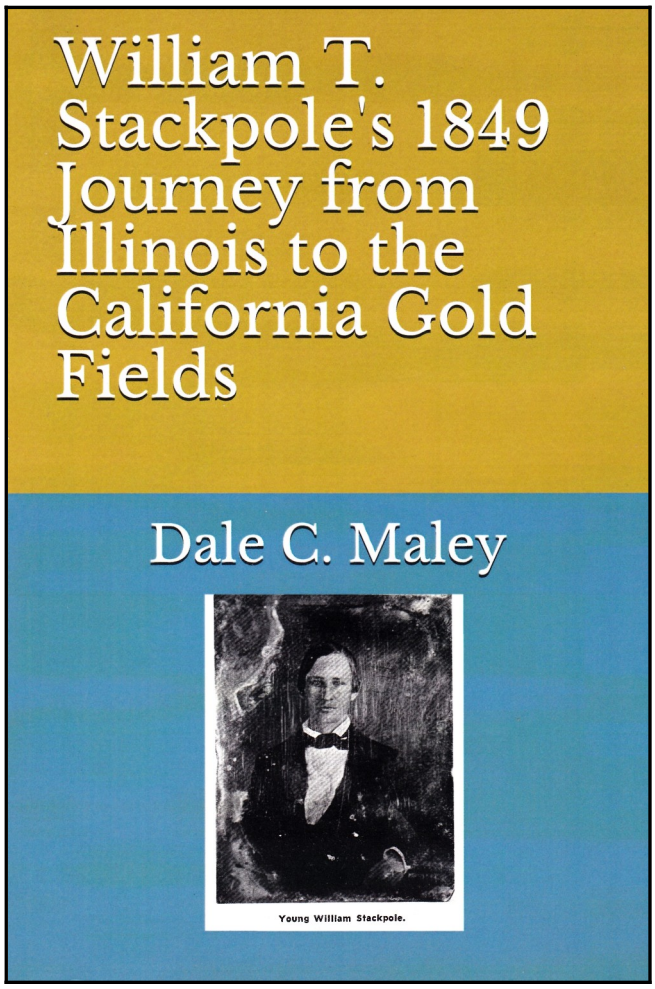
William T. Stackpole Safely Travels Through Southern Nebraska on Way to California in 1849

Nelson Buck likely knew William T. Stackpole because Mr. Stackpole was a real estate developer in early Fairbury, about 15 miles from Pontiac.

William T. Stackpole kept a diary as he traveled from Peoria, Illinois, to the California gold fields. During the month of May in 1849, Stackpole's party traveled across southern Nebraska to Castle Rock.

Stackpole recorded that he saw some large tribes of Sioux in Nebraska. The Sioux caused no problems for Stackpole's party during May of 1849.

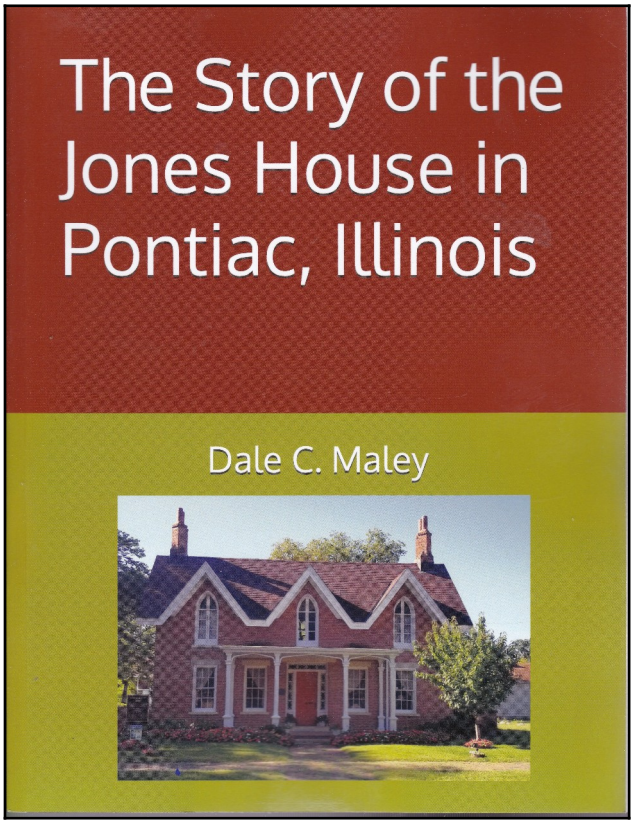
For more details about Stackpole's trip across Nebraska in 1849, see the author's book titled ***William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields.***



Henry Jones of Pontiac Makes Three Trips Through Nebraska on the Way to the California Gold Fields

Henry Jones was a County Judge in Pontiac and likely knew Nelson Buck. Judge Henry Jones made three trips through Nebraska on the way to the California gold fields. He made trips in 1849, 1852, and 1859. Judge Jones noted that Native Americans could create problems, but their parties were able to avoid any major conflicts.

For more details on these three expeditions, see the author's book ***The Story of the Jones House in Pontiac, Illinois***.



Another Nelson Buck Advertisement in the 1849 Pantagraph

In August of 1849, he ran another ad notifying customers they could pay him for his nursery products or his surveying services at a store location in Bloomington. This ad was also redrawn because the original was very faint and hard to read.

NOTICE!

PERSONS Owing me on book account for fruit trees or surveying, are requested to call and settle by note or otherwise; and those whose notes are due must come in and pay up, as I am making arrangements to procure some extra surveying instruments, and also the original field notes of the surveys, so that I need all the money I can collect. My books and papers are at Jno. Foster's store. NELSON BUCK

Bloomington, August 4th, 1849 40 3m

In December of 1849, Nelson Buck used the Pantagraph to inform potential customers that he could perform more accurate surveys than the County Surveyors. In that era, counties would often elect a County Surveyor. Nelson Buck repeated this ad many times in 1850 and 1851 in the Pantagraph.

SURVEYOR'S NOTICE

THE subscriber informs the public of this county that he is prepared to do all kinds of surveying as heretofore. Having certified copies of the field notes from the General surveyor's office for most of the important Townships, he can be more correct than with the material possessed by the county surveyor.

NELSON BUCK

Another Mention of Nelson Buck Having First Nursery in Normal, Illinois

In 1965, Eloise B. Craig wrote an article that appeared in the Normalite newspaper. Her article was about the history of nurseries in Normal, Illinois. An excerpt appears below.

> Normal's first business enterprise was the nursery business, which had its beginning about 1850 in the area north and east of the present town. For the first 25 years the town's main source of income was derived from nurseries, berries, horses and the university students.
>
> The nurseries were numerous and Normal had few rivals in the Midwest. Hundreds of acres surrounding the two mile square incorporated town were set out in trees, small fruits, berries and vegetables, especially asparagus.
>
> It is difficult for us, so used to the tree lined streets and beautiful shaded lawns, to picture the vast open, treeless prairies that the early settlers found. Mainly coming from the wooded areas of Pennsylvania and Ohio, these people missed the trees. Very early they set out fruit and shade trees which grew into vast nurseries as

the early towns came into existence and the demand for trees increased.

William McCambridge, son of the first station master in Normal, painted a picture of early Normal in a letter describing the “spring freshlets, which because of lack of drainage, overflowed the little streams and covered the low marshy places. These, however, became beautiful floral transformations in the center of what is now Normal. In the spring and early summer, the bursting forth of cowslips and marsh marigolds among wide ribbons of vivid light green leaves became brilliant in the sunlight. Down the valley and up as far as one could see was the cowslip glory, brighter than the primrose and the buttercup. And then came the morning later on when the swamp mustard blossoms made great splashes of pure white, and the days when the phlox blossomed in pink patches set on the tawny green upland grass and the deeper and ranker green of the lowlands.” There were clumps of low willows along the water courses, but these were the only native trees.

Nelson Buck had the earliest nursery, followed by Jesse Fell and his brothers, Joshua, Thomas, Kersey and Robert.

Nelson Buck Marries for Third Time in 1850

On November 14, 1850, Nelson Buck married Maria Tracy, the widow of Augustus Fellows, in Pontiac, Illinois. He was 42 and she was 38 when they married. Nelson and Maria Buck had no children.

Nelson's children from previous marriage included thirteen year old Willard, eleven year old Cordelia, and 18 year old Clarissa.

1850 Census

Nelson Buck could not be found in the 1850 U.S. Census.

Nelson Buck's three children were living with their grandparents in Peoria, Illinois.

Household members

Name	Age
Aholiah Buck	73
Annis Buck	72
Willard P Buck	14
Carissa W Buck	16
Cordelia Buck	12

1878 History Book Says Nelson Buck Moved to Pontiac About 1850

> After the death of Augustus Fellows, his widow married Nelson Buck, who came about this time, from McLean County, and who has since figured largely in the affairs of Livingston, and especially in the local politics and business of Pontiac.
>
> Mr. Buck was the President of the first Board of Trustees elected in the town. He was, for many terms, elected Surveyor of the county, in the the discharge of which duties he took the greatest pride.

Daughter of Nelson Buck Died in 1851

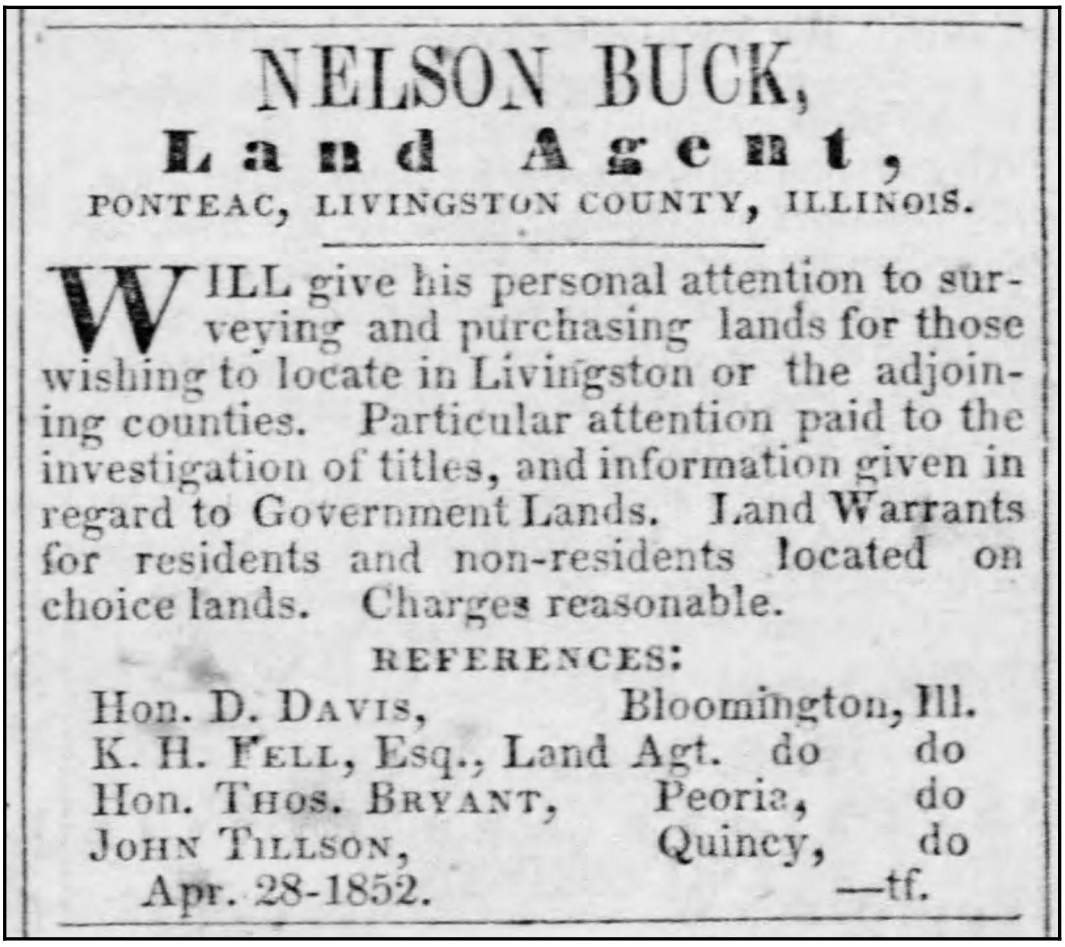
Clarissa Buck, daughter of Nelson Buck, died in Pontiac on July 18, 1851. She was only 19 years of age.

Clarissa Buck was buried in Pontiac's Southside Cemetery with her sister Cordelia and Cordelia's husband.

Nelson Buck was 43 years of age when his daughter Clarissa died in 1851.

Nelson Buck Moved to Pontiac by 1852

The May 1852 issue of the Pantagraph is the first mention of Nelson Buck having moved from Bloomington to Pontiac. Mr. Buck repeated this ad many times in 1852 and 1853.



NELSON BUCK,

Land Agent,

PONTEAC, LIVINGSTON COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

WILL give his personal attention to surveying and purchasing lands for those wishing to locate in Livingston or the adjoining counties. Particular attention paid to the investigation of titles, and information given in regard to Government Lands. Land Warrants for residents and non-residents located on choice lands. Charges reasonable.

REFERENCES:

Hon. D. DAVIS,	Bloomington,	Ill.
K. H. FELL, Esq., Land Agt.	do	do
Hon. THOS. BRYANT,	Peoria,	do
JOHN TILLSON,	Quincy,	do

Apr. 28-1852. —tf.

Nelson Buck Involved with Untangling Legal Claims to Early Pontiac Land

The 1878 history book explains why the chain-of-ownership is complicated for land in the city of Pontiac.

> It will, doubtless, be entertaining to anyone having a real estate interest in the town of Pontiac, to follow, for a little distance, the chain of title of the lands which they now occupy, and which, as

we have seen, were primarily vested by right of preemption in Weed and the two Youngs.

The three men were originally equally interested in the town site, and in some of the adjoining lands; but, before a patent was obtained from the Government. the Youngs both died. Weed then, in 1839, entered the land and the title of the whole tract was consequently in his name.

Soon after this, Isaac Fellows, a brother-in-law to the Youngs, came out from New York for the purpose of administering on their estate, and of securing to himself, as heir, their interest.

Amicable settlement was made, by Weed transferring an undivided one-half interest in the tract to Isaac Fellows. Thus Fellows and Weed became joint proprietors of the town. Subsequently. Isaac Fellows conveyed to Augustus Fellows all of his interest. and some other parties, who laid some claim to the Young estate, quit-claimed to him. The title then vested in Henry Weed and Augustus Fellows.

In 1842, Henry Weed died, leaving, as his heirs, Henry Weed, Jr., John P. Lewis and Henry Stephens-the last two by virtue of their marriage with Weed's daughters. In 1849, Augustus Fellows died, leaving the undivided half interest to his wife, who subsequently married Nelson Buck.

A few years later, a suit. was instituted for the purpose of dividing the property. Commissioners were appointed, and what was considered by them as an equitable portion was set off to the heirs of Weed, Lewis, Stevens and Weed-and the remainder to Mrs. Buck.

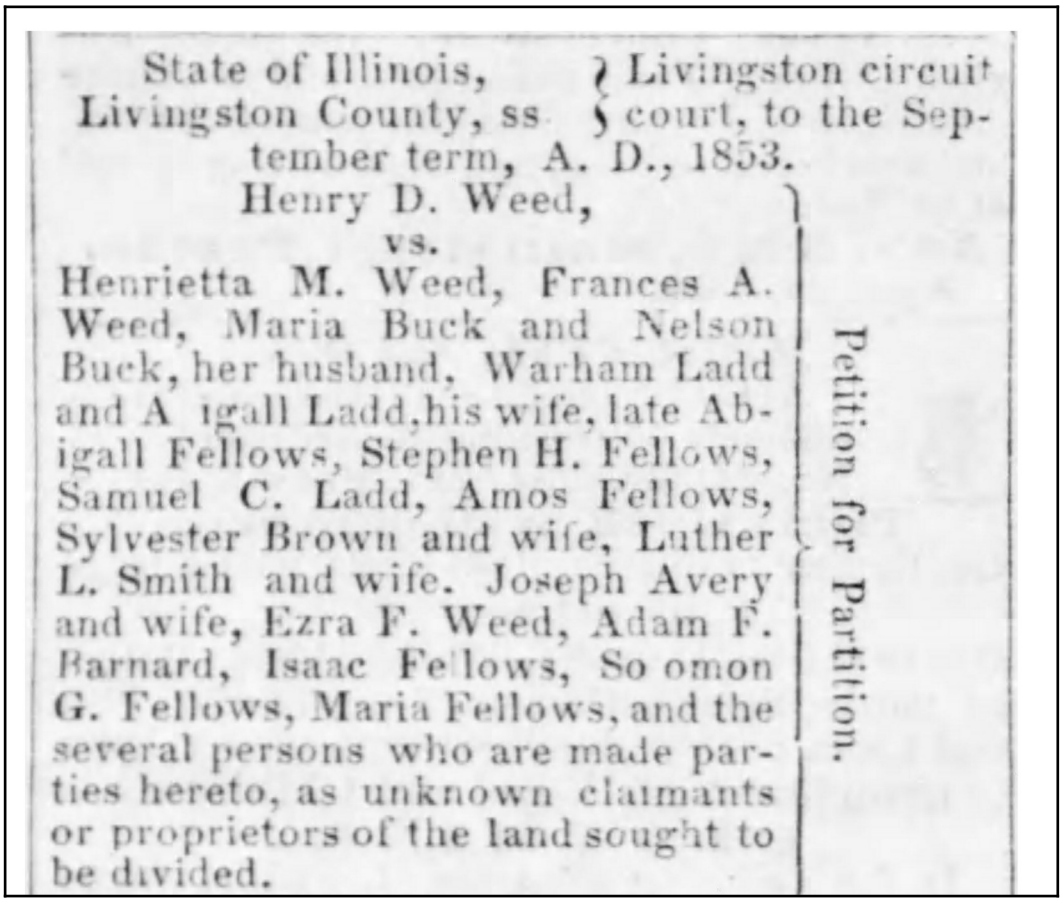
This will explain how some of the oldest titles run from Weed, and some from Weed and Fellows, and why some of the more modern primary titles run from Stevens, Lewis and Weed, and others from Mr. Buck.

CHAPTER 5

1853 to 1867

Nelson Buck and Wife Involved with Settling Land Claims in Pontiac

The April 20, 1853, edition of the Pantagraph published about court proceedings involving settling land claims in Pontiac.



State of Illinois, } Livingston circuit
Livingston County, ss. } court, to the September term, A. D., 1853.

Henry D. Weed,

vs.

Henrietta M. Weed, Frances A. Weed, Maria Buck and Nelson Buck, her husband, Warham Ladd and A igall Ladd, his wife, late Abigall Fellows, Stephen H. Fellows, Samuel C. Ladd, Amos Fellows, Sylvester Brown and wife, Luther L. Smith and wife. Joseph Avery and wife, Ezra F. Weed, Adam F. Barnard, Isaac Fellows, So omon G. Fellows, Maria Fellows, and the several persons who are made parties hereto, as unknown claimants or proprietors of the land sought to be divided.

Petition for Partition.

AFFIDAVIT having been made in this cause satisfactorily showing that the said defendants, Henrietta M. Weed, Frances M. Weed, Warham Ladd and Abigall Ladd, his wife, Amos Fellows, Solomon G. Fellows, Isaac Fellows, Sylvester Brown and Ann Brown, and Stephen H. Fellows, are all non-residents of the State of Illinois, and the names of the wives of said Sylvester Brown, Joseph Avery and Luther T. Smith are unknown, and that the names of other persons who have or pretend to have some claim on parcels of the lands of which Henry Weed, Sen. died seized, are unknown. Now, notice is hereby given to all of said defendants, and to every person interested in said land, that unless you be and appear at the next term of the Livingston circuit court, to be holden at Ponteac on the second Monday in September, A. D., 1853, and plead, answer or demur to the plaintiffs petition for partition, filed in this cause, the same will be taken for confessed against you, order of partition will be granted, and decree entered according to the prayer of said partition.

GEO. W. BOYER, Clerk.

Fell & Walker.

Plaintiff's Solicitors. 4w-17

Livingston County Elections for County Surveyor Position

According to the 1878 Livingston County History book, Nelson Buck was involved with several elections for the position of County Surveyor.

The voting results for the 1853 county election for Surveyor were James Stout, 136; Charles Rustin, 73; Amos Edwards. 48; Nelson Buck, 58; E. B. Oliver, 21. Nelson Buck lost that election.

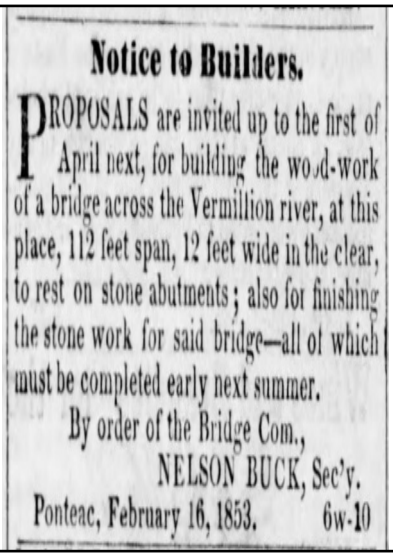
Nelson Buck also lost the 1854 election. The voting results were F. Norton, 267; I. R. Clark, 80; N. Buck, 115.

In 1857, Nelson Buck won the County Surveyor election. The results were Nelson Buck, 493; James Stout, 144.

He also won the election for County Surveyor in 1863.

Nelson Buck Involved with Building a New Bridge Across the Vermilion River in 1853

The March 9, 1853, edition of the Pantagraph had an ad taken out by Nelson Buck seeking bids on building a new bridge across the Vermilion River in Pontiac.



Notice to Builders.

PROPOSALS are invited up to the first of April next, for building the wood-work of a bridge across the Vermillion river, at this place, 112 feet span, 12 feet wide in the clear, to rest on stone abutments; also for finishing the stone work for said bridge—all of which must be completed early next summer.

By order of the Bridge Com.,
NELSON BUCK, Sec'y.

Pontiac, February 16, 1853. 6w-10

Nelson Buck Surveyed Dwight in 1853

According to the 1878 history book, Dwight was first surveyed by Nelson Buck, Deputy County Surveyor, for Amos Edwards, the regular Surveyor of the county, in the Fall of 1853, for R. P. Morgan, Jr., Jas. C. Spencer, John Lathrop, and J. and K. W. Fell, who owned the land on which it stands.

Nelson Buck Involved with Banning Sale of Alcohol in Pontiac in 1855

The 1878 history book recounts the main political issue in early Pontiac was whether or not to allow the sale of alcohol. Nelson Buck was apparently on the side of banning the sale of alcohol.

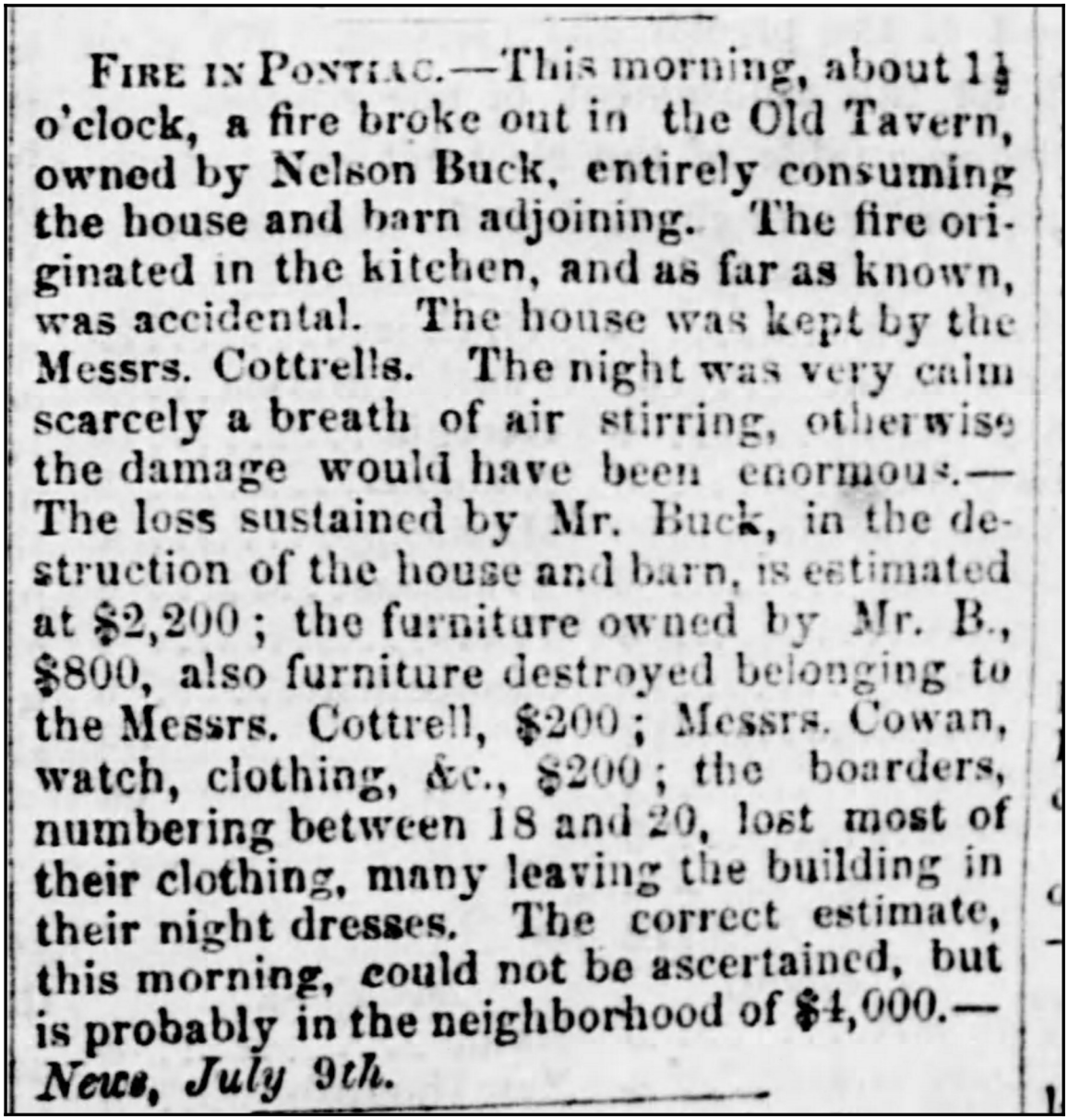
> A newspaper was started, the first number appearing March 14, 1855, only eight months after the completion of the road. As further indicating the condition of affairs at the seat of justice, a few items gleaned from its pages are here given.
>
> The first item noticed is one which shows an improved sentiment in regard to the morals of the people. A meeting had been called at the Court House to take into consideration the means of suppressing the sale of intoxicating liquors. J. H. Dart was Chairman and Samuel C. Ladd was appointed Secretary. After duly considering the matter, a resolution was adopted, to the effect that a committee be appointed to wait on the liquor dealers and request them to stop the business. The Committee consisted of Wm. T. Garner. Wm. B. Lyon, H. I. Norton, Robert Aerl and I. P. McDowell. The committee to draft the resolution was composed of George Bishop, Nelson Buck, J. H. McGregor and Darius Johnson.

Nelson Buck Was the First Chairman of the Pontiac Board of Trustees in 1856

According to the 1878 history book, the village of Pontiac was incorporated under the general law of the State, February 12, 1856, by the election of a Board of Trustees, consisting of Nelson Buck, J. W. Strevell, S. C. Ladd, Z. H. Nettleton and H. Jones ─the first named being chosen Chairman or President.

Tavern Owned by Nelson Buck Burns in 1856

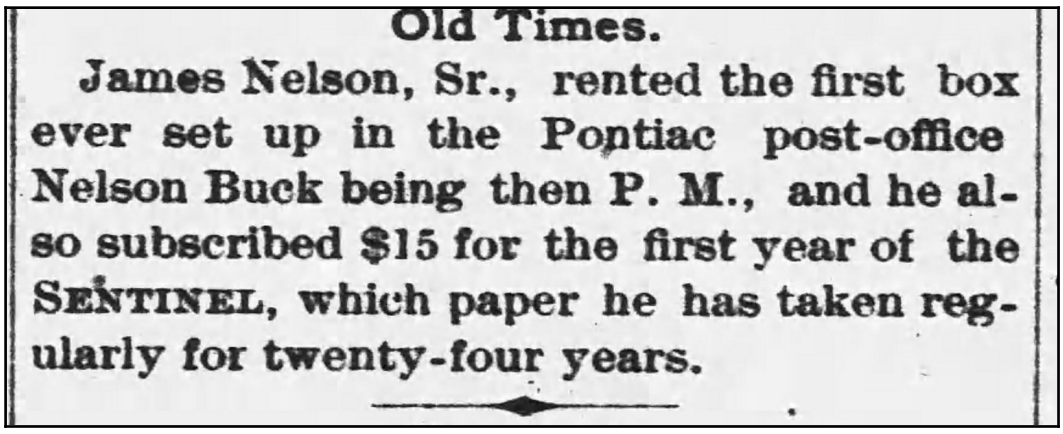
According to the July 26, 1856, issue of the Ottawa Free Trader, this tavern burned down.



FIRE IN PONTIAC.—This morning, about 1½ o'clock, a fire broke out in the Old Tavern, owned by Nelson Buck, entirely consuming the house and barn adjoining. The fire originated in the kitchen, and as far as known, was accidental. The house was kept by the Messrs. Cottrells. The night was very calm scarcely a breath of air stirring, otherwise the damage would have been enormous.—The loss sustained by Mr. Buck, in the destruction of the house and barn, is estimated at $2,200; the furniture owned by Mr. B., $800, also furniture destroyed belonging to the Messrs. Cottrell, $200; Messrs. Cowan, watch, clothing, &c., $200; the boarders, numbering between 18 and 20, lost most of their clothing, many leaving the building in their night dresses. The correct estimate, this morning, could not be ascertained, but is probably in the neighborhood of $4,000.—*News, July 9th.*

Nelson Buck May Have Been Pontiac Postmaster in 1857

The May 4, 1881, edition of the Pontiac Sentinel, published a story about a gentleman taking out a post office box 24 years earlier from Postmaster Nelson Buck. It this is true, Nelson Buck would have been the Pontiac Postmaster in 1857 (24 years before the 1881 article date). No other documentation could be found to substantiate that he was a Postmaster of Pontiac.



Old Times.

James Nelson, Sr., rented the first box ever set up in the Pontiac post-office Nelson Buck being then P. M., and he also subscribed $15 for the first year of the SENTINEL, which paper he has taken regularly for twenty-four years.

Nelson Buck Surveyed the Village of Chatsworth in 1859

According to the 1878 history book, Nelson Buck first surveyed Chatsworth in 1859.

> Chatsworth is situated on the Toledo, Peoria & Warsaw Railway, about forty miles from the state line, and seventy miles from the city of Peoria. It was surveyed and laid out by Nelson Buck, County Surveyor, June 8, 1859, for Zeno Secor and Cornelia Gilman of New York, who owned the land on which it is located.

Civil War Started in 1861

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor. Less than 34 hours later, Union forces surrendered. Traditionally, this event has been used to mark the beginning of the Civil War.

There is no record of Nelson Buck serving in the Civil War. Nelson would have been 53 years of age when the Civil War started in 1861.

Son of Nelson Buck Served in the Civil War

Willard P. Buck (1837-1909) was the son of Nelson Buck and Annis Knapp. Willard enlisted in Company A of the 47th Illinois Infantry on August 16, 1861, at Peoria. Willard was 24 years of age when he enlisted in the Union Army.

Willard was discharged on April 19, 1862, because of a disability suffered in the war.

Willard enlisted for a 100 day assignment on April 30, 1864, in Company F of the 138th Illinois Infantry. He was mustered out October 14, 1864.

Willard Buck never married. In the 1900 Census, he was living at the Soldier's Home in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He died in Grand Rapids in 1909 at the age of 72.

Nelson Buck Surveyed and Laid Out the Pontiac Southside Cemetery in 1863

The 1878 history book recounts how the Southside Cemetery was created.

> The cemetery is a pretty little burying ground, and was laid out by Nelson Buck in 1863, and it kept in good order. Mrs. Griffing, wife of R. F. Griffing, was the first person buried in it. She was taken up from the farm where she had been originally interred, and removed to this new burying place, where it was found that it was all that four stout men could do to carry the coffin, a fact that gave rise to the supposition that the remains had become petrified. Her husband and friends, however, would not consent to have the coffin opened and examined.

Daughter of Nelson Buck Married in 1864 in Pontiac

Cordelia Buck, daughter of Nelson Buck and Annis Knapp (1812-1844) married Charles Edward Watson (1833-1887) in 1864 in Pontiac. He was 31 and Cordelia was 24 when they married. Charles and Cordelia Watson had three children.

Nelson Buck was 56 years of age in 1864 when he became a grandfather.

Nelson Buck was also the grandfather of five grandchildren from his son Oliver Perry Buck – Wethey, but there is no evidence he was aware of the existence of these grandchildren in Cayuga County, New York.

Nelson Buck One of Founders of the Chicago & Paducah Railroad in 1865

A group of Pontiac men were involved with the formation of the Chicago & Paducah Railroad that ran from Pontiac to Fairbury. Nelson Buck was one of these men. The charter was approved in 1865.

A. J. Cropsey Moves from Fairbury, Illinois to Lincoln, Nebraska after the Civil War

Nelson Buck likely knew A. J. Cropsey before the war because Mr. Cropsey was a real estate developer in both Cropsey, and Fairbury, Illinois.

The author researched and wrote the story below about Mr. Cropsey. It was published in the Fairbury Blade newspaper in April of 2020. A copy is shown below.

> **Colorful Founder of Cropsey**
>
> By: Dale C. Maley
>
> Andrew Jackson Cropsey was born December 22, 1823, in Niagara County, New York, to Daniel W. Cropsey (1797-1882) and Elizabeth Straight Cropsey (1797-1871). Andrew left home to go to Cincinnati to become a lawyer. In 1847, he married Maria Jane Harrington (1825-1874). She was an accomplished daughter of a widow living in the suburbs of Cincinnati. She was skilled at sewing and made dresses for a neighborhood clientele.
> A.J. Cropsey had four sons by his first wife. They were Daniel Burns Cropsey, Louis Edward Cropsey, Allen J. Cropsey, and Cassius M. Cropsey. Two additional sons died in infancy.

After two years of practice as a lawyer in Cincinnati, he moved to Will County, where his parents had moved. In 1854, Andrew moved to what is now Cropsey Township. He was the first settler in the Cropsey area. A.J. Cropsey did not remain long. He moved to Fairbury, the nearest railroad point to his farm.

Fairbury was founded in 1857 by Caleb Patten when the railroad tracks were laid. In 1859, Mr. Patton disposed of his interest in the town lots to Andrew J. Cropsey. Mr. Cropsey became a major real estate developer in the new village of Fairbury.

In the 1860 U.S. Census, A.J. Cropsey was shown living in Indian Grove Township. His occupation was listed as a farmer. He had $8,000 in real estate and $2,000 in his personal estate. This net worth would be equivalent to $288,000 in today's dollars.

In April of 1860, A.J. Cropsey was selected to be a representative at the famous Wigwam Illinois Republican convention held in Decatur, Illinois. The term wigwam was borrowed from the Native American term for a temporary structure. The gathering was held on May 9, 1860, and involved some 2,500 people. A tent 100 feet wide and 70 feet deep was procured from a local circus company to house the crowd.

The Illinois Republicans adopted a resolution stating, "That Abraham Lincoln is the first choice of Illinois for the Presidency, and that our delegates be instructed to use all honorable means for his nomination at the Chicago convention, and to cast their votes as a unit for him." Less than a week later, the National Republican Convention opened in Chicago, and the Illinois Republicans kept their word and nominated Lincoln for President. A.J Cropsey likely met Abraham Lincoln at this nominating convention.

Within about a year and a half after attending the Decatur convention, A.J. Cropsey helped organize the 129th Illinois Infantry. The regiment was organized on September 8, 1862, with George P. Smith, of Dwight, as Colonel; Henry Case, of Winchester, Lieutenant Colonel; and A. J. Cropsey, of Fairbury, Major. Mr. Cropsey recruited Fairbury area men to form Company E.

After the Civil War ended, he moved his family to the Lincoln, Nebraska area. He was one of the early developers of Lincoln. Some of his Civil War comrades from Fairbury moved with him to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Cropsey's first wife died in 1874 when he was 51 years old. Andrew then married thirty-three-year-old Emma Francis Rockwood (1842 - 1917). She was the daughter of John & Delia (Cummings) Rockwood. Emma made the trek, with her parents, from Vermont to McHenry County, Illinois, by wagon train when she was five years old.

Emma grew to adulthood on her father's farm and became a school teacher. In 1875 she took a teaching job in Lincoln, Nebraska. Emma returned home that summer but was followed by a young widower she had met in Nebraska. Emma married Andrew J. Cropsey in August of 1875 in McHenry County, Illinois.

A.J. Cropsey was a major real estate developer in Lincoln, Nebraska. He was prominent in developing University Place and Nebraska Wesleyan University. Cropsey was elected to the state senate in 1870 while he conducted a significant real estate business and was a partner in Capitol Mills. The following year, A.J. Cropsey built a large house at 1421 H St. on land he purchased from Gov. David Butler. Cropsey purchased all of Block 151, directly south of the Capitol, from the governor. Almost immediately, it became unclear if the land was ever technically Butler's to sell. There were no records showing that Butler had bought the property from the state as he claimed.

Cropsey began construction of his large, two-story, brick and stone, 15-room home on two of the 12 lots on the block in 1870. Described in detail as the Meier House in Bess Streeter Aldrich's "Spring Came On Forever," the home, one of the finest in the city, was completed in 1871.

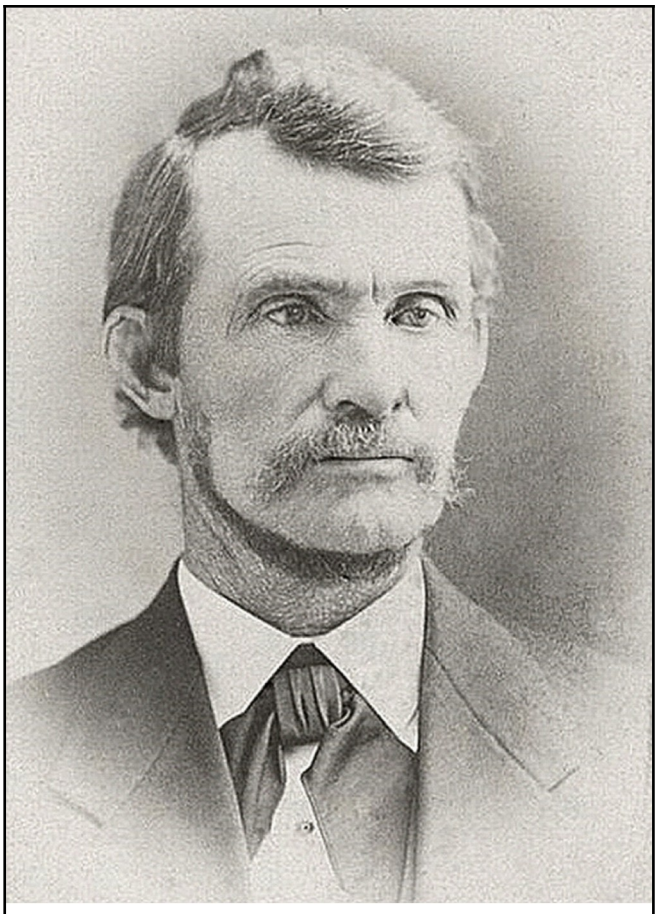
In the spring of 1871, soon after taking office for his third term, eleven articles of impeachment were brought against Governor Butler. The first charged him with misuse of some $16,000 from the state school fund. Butler had allegedly made personal use of this money to purchase lots in the new city of Lincoln. Butler sold some of these lots to A.J. Cropsey. Butler was suspended from office by the Supreme Court and subsequently tried by the State Senate. He was convicted on the first charge, although the remaining ten were dropped. The Supreme Court then removed him from office on June 2, 1871.

A.J. Cropsey suffered several financial reversals. After one of these failures, he relocated from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Texas. From there, he returned to Lincoln. Again having financial troubles, A.J. Cropsey removed to Ogden UT. He died in Ogden at

the age of 72 in 1896. He was buried in the Mountain View Cemetery in Ogden, Utah.

Other people occupied Cropsey's beautiful house in Lincoln after his death. Eventually, it sat vacant for ten years. The empty house was acquired by the state of Nebraska and razed for the construction of the present governor's mansion.

A.J. Cropsey was a Civil War hero and led a very colorful life in both Illinois and Nebraska. The town of Cropsey and Cropsey Township were both named after him. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a colorful Civil War poster showing the entire roster of Cropsey's Company E.



A. J. Cropsey (1823-1896)

Nebraska Became a State in 1867

Wikipedia has the history of how Nebraska became a state in 1867.

> A constitution for Nebraska was drawn up in 1866. There was some controversy over Nebraska's admission as a state, in view of a provision in the 1866 constitution restricting suffrage to White voters; eventually, on February 8, 1867, the United States Congress voted to admit Nebraska as a state provided that suffrage was not denied to non-white voters. The bill admitting Nebraska as a state was vetoed by President Andrew Johnson, but the veto was overridden by a super-majority in both Houses of Congress. Nebraska became the first–and to this day the only–state to be admitted to the Union by means of a veto override.

The statehood of Nebraska meant a lot of new settlers would come to the state and there would be a great need to survey all the land in the state. This meant a lot of surveyors would be needed to accomplish this task.

First Biography and Photo of Nelson Buck in the 1900 History Book

All of the mentions of Nelson Buck in the 1878 history book are shown in earlier chapters. There were no mentions of Nelson Buck in the 1888 history book.

The 1900 history book contains the first biography and photo of Nelson Buck. Nelson Buck died in 1869, so this book was published 31 years after his death. A copy of the biography is shown below.

> **NELSON BUCK**
>
> Nelson Buck, deceased, was a well known citizen of Pontiac from 1850 to 1869. He was born in Chemung county, New York, April 10, 1808, and was a son of Aholiab and Annis (Drake) Buck, but who at a very early day came west and located in Peoria county, Illinois. On his removal to Illinois, on the present site of the city of Peoria there was only a block house and the place was known as Fort Clark. Aholiab Buck took up a tract of land from the general government about eleven miles from the present city, which he improved and on which he resided until his death. His wife, who was a member of the Presbyterian church, survived him for some years, dying in 1860, at the age of nearly eighty-three years. She was a daughter of Benjamin Drake, a native of one of the eastern states.

Nelson Buck grew to his manhood in his native county and there received a good literary and musical education, being for some years a teacher of vocal music. He first married Miss Fidelia Withey, of Port Byron, New York, and they made their home in that place until her death. With his father's family he then came west to Peoria county, and later married Miss Annie Knapp, daughter of James and Margaret (Drake) Knapp, also eastern people from near Homer, New York. She was born in 1812.

After his arrival in Peoria county, Mr. Buck learned surveying and followed the occupation of a surveyor during the remainder of his residence in that county, doing much of the early survey work, and being a careful and methodical man the correctness of his lines was seldom questioned. He continued to reside in Peoria county until about 1840, when he moved with his family to Bloomington, McLean county, where he continued to follow his chosen occupation. He also established one of the first nurseries in that vicinity, in which line of business he was quite successful. While residing in Bloomington, in 1844, his wife died, leaving five children. Clarissa died, a young lady, in 1854, in Pontiac. Willard P. was a member of the Forty-seventh Illinois Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, and faithfully served his country in that terrible struggle for the preservation of the Union. He is now a resident of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Cordelia is now the widow of Charles Watson and resides in Pontiac. Alice and Edwin died young.

Mr. Buck lived in Bloomington and continued his business there until his marriage, in 1850, with Mrs. Maria Fellows, of Pontiac, when he removed to the latter city and took charge of her estate, which consisted of a farm, hotel, and many town lots and undivided real estate in that place. By his sound business judgment he put the estate into good shape and which later realized a handsome return. He never would permit a bar to be run in connection with the hotel, but run it on strict temperance principles. It burned down July 9, 1856.

Mr. Buck's skill as a surveyor secured him the appointment as government surveyor in 1869, and he was sent to resurvey the line between Kansas and Nebraska. He left Plattsmouth, Nebraska, July 5. 1869, and was last heard from at Fort Kearney, from which place he started for Fort McPherson, but never reached the latter place, being killed by the Indians while en route.

In the various places where he made his home, Mr. Buck became somewhat prominent in business, social and musical circles. He was one of the early trustees of the village of Pontiac, before the present thriving place put on city airs. He took an active part in the prosecution of every movement for the improvement of the village, and much credit is due him for its substantial growth just prior to and after the close of the Civil war.

Mr. Buck never lost his interest in musical affairs and while residing in Bloomington, he was one of the most prominent musicians of the place. He was a member of the Presbyterian church, connected with its choir and early introduced a violin as a help to the musical exercises of its services, much to the horror of some of the good, staid old members of the church, a few of whom arose and walked out of the church.

On his removal to Pontiac he became prominent in musical circles here, as well as leader of the choir in the Methodist Episcopal church. Fraternally he was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

Few men in Livingston county were better known or held in higher esteem than Nelson Buck, and his untimely death was mourned not alone by his immediate family but the entire community as well.

Comments on the Nelson Buck Biography in the 1900 History Book

The available data sources for writing the 1900 history book were the previously written 1878 and 1888 history books. Another available data source was family members.

Since Nelson Buck died in 1869, his surviving family members in 1900 were his third wife, his daughter, and his son. His third wife, Maria Tracy was in Pontiac and was 88 years of age.

Cordelia Buck – Watson, daughter of Nelson Buck, was 61 years of age and was living in Pontiac. Willard P. Buck, son of Nelson Buck, was 63 years of age and was living in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

So the most likely family data source was Cordelia Buck – Watson.

The 1900 biography mentions that Nelson Buck first married Miss Fidelia Withey, of Port Byron, New York. He last name is miss-spelled as Withey versus the correct spelling of Wethey. The biography also does not mention Oliver P. Buck, son of Nelson Buck and Fidelia Wethey.

The 1900 biography also leads the reader to understand that Clarissa Buck was the daughter of Nelson Buck and Annis Knapp.

One new piece of information in the 1900 biography is that Nelson Buck was a music teacher when he lived in New York.

Another new piece of information is that Nelson Buck learned surveying when he lived in Peoria County, Illinois.

At this time, the year that Aholiab Buck and his son Nelson Buck came to Peoria is not known exactly. The 1900 biography refers to Peoria first being named as Fort Clark. Wikipedia has a history of Peoria and an excerpt is shown below.

> Established in 1691 by the French explorer Henri Tonti, Peoria is the oldest permanent European settlement in Illinois according to the Illinois State Archaeological Survey. Originally known as Fort Clark, it received its current name when the County of Peoria was organized in 1825. The city was named after the Peoria people, a member of the Illinois Confederation.

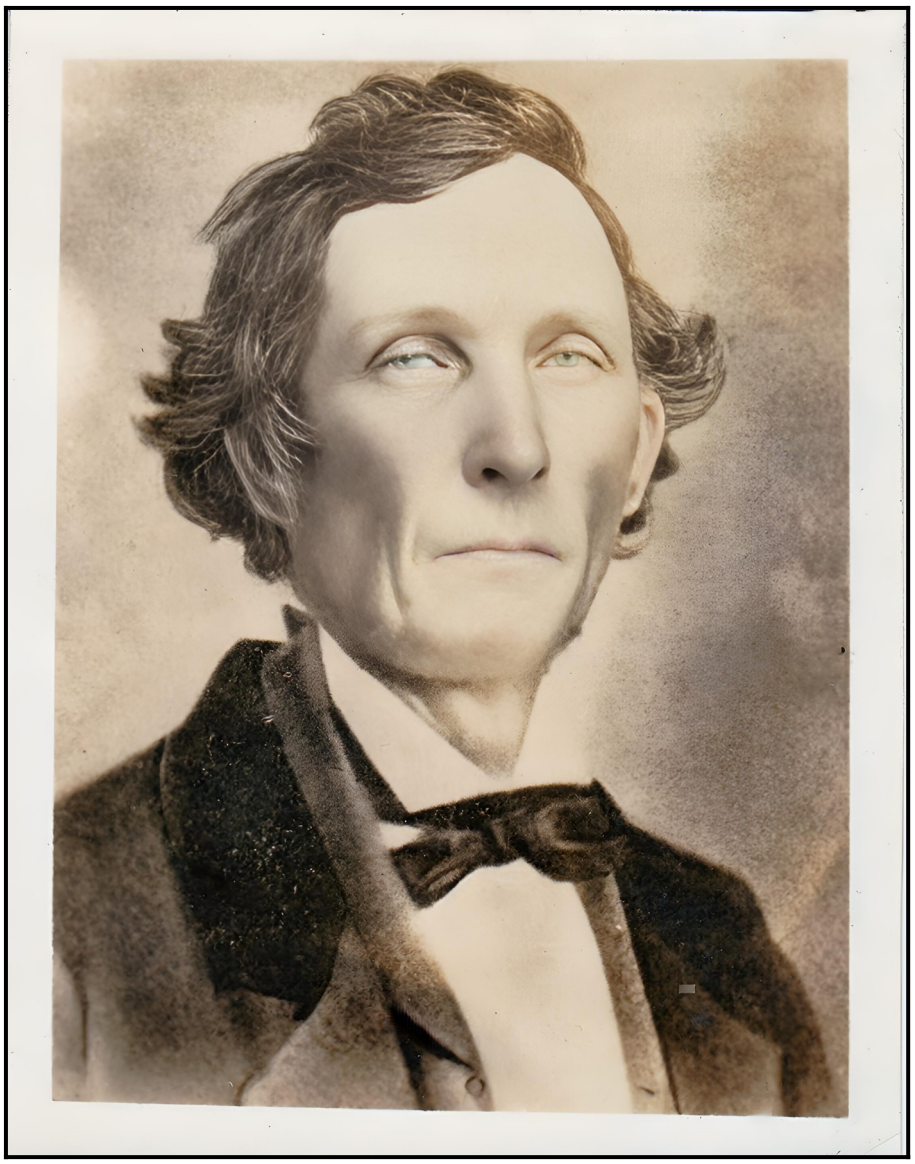
Nelson Buck married Annis Knapp in 1834 in Montgomery, Illinois. Both Aholiab and Nelson Buck bought land in Peoria in 1840.

The 1900 biography stated that Nelson Buck moved from Peoria to Bloomington around 1840.

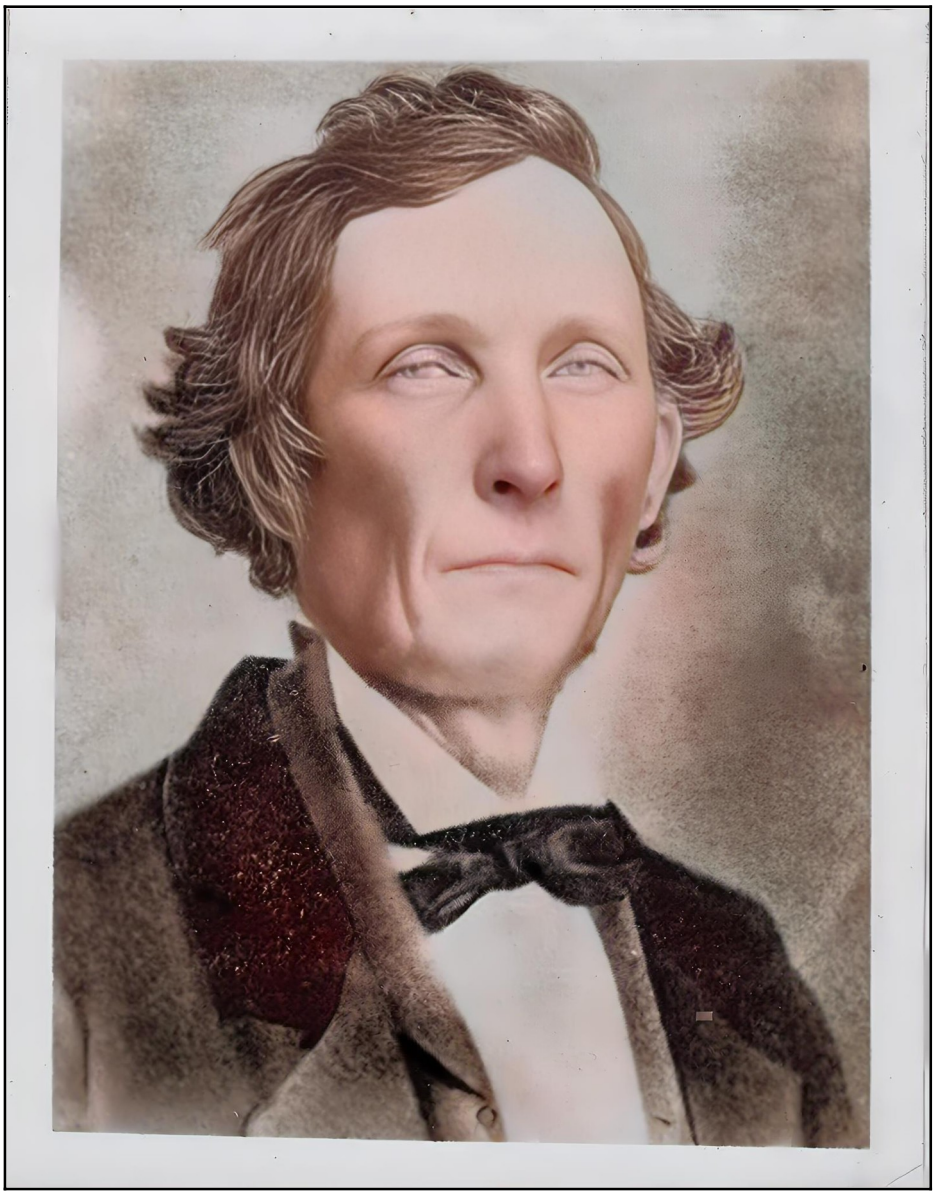
Illustration of Nelson Buck in 1900 History Book

The history book has an illustration of Nelson Buck. A better copy of this illustration was found in the archives of the Livingston County Historical Society in 2024.

Software by Fotor.Com was used to repair the black and white illustration found in the Livingston County Historical Society archives in 2024 by the author. This version is shown below.



The Fotor software was used to colorize this black and white illustration and it is shown below.



CHAPTER 6

1868

Judge Woodford G. McDowell Scouts Nebraska Land in 1868

Judge Woodford G. McDowell was a Livingston County, Illinois, lawyer and judge. It is extremely likely that Nelson Buck knew Judge McDowell in Pontiac.

The book titled ***The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois***, has a complete description of how Judge McDowell scouted the land in southeastern Nebraska to pick the future site of his new Nebraska town. An excerpt from the book is shown below.

> In the fall of 1868 Woodford G. McDowell, an attorney, judge and financial man of Fairbury, Illinois, came to Nebraska's frontier to get in on the land investment. He went by the way of Beatrice where he purchased city lots and land in Gage county. Learning of the land opportunities in Jefferson County he proceeded on to this territory to look over the lay of the land that he too could get in on quick land profits that was in the offering with the not too far off coming of the St. Joseph & Denver City Railroad.
>
> By team and spring wagon he followed the course of the Little Blue River, the route to be taken by the iron horse, selecting land likely to make good town sites. In the frontier trail town of Meridian near the west line of Jefferson County, McDowell purchased a number of lots.

Judge McDowell founded a new town in Nebraska in 1869, and he named it after his hometown back in Illinois. The new town was named Fairbury, Nebraska.

In the historical records, there is no evidence that Judge McDowell had any problems with Nebraska Native Americans when he scouted the land around what is now Fairbury, Nebraska, in 1868.

Fairbury, Nebraska is about 185 miles straight east of Marion, Nebraska, where the Nelson Buck party was massacred. It is possible that in 1868 there were less confrontations between white settlers and the native Americans where Fairbury, Nebraska is located today.

The author wrote a short story about the life of Judge McDowell in 2023 for local Fairbury, Illinois, media. A copy of this article is shown below.

Fascinating Family Life of Judge Woodford McDowell

By: Dale C. Maley
For: FairburyNews.Net
Date: March 11, 2024

Judge Woodford G. McDowell was one of the pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area. He founded the villages of Avoca and McDowell and was elected a Livingston County Judge. He also spent about four years in Nebraska and established the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska. Judge McDowell then retired to Washington, DC.

Judge Woodford McDowell's life story begins with his birth in 1818 in Scioto County, Ohio. In 1832, his family emigrated to Illinois, and he became one of the first pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area. Judge McDowell was fourteen years old when he arrived in the Fairbury area.

Unfortunately, just two years after the McDowell family arrived in Fairbury, the patriarch, William McDowell, died at 48 in 1834. William McDowell was a veteran of the War of 1812 and was buried in the Avoca Cemetery. Judge McDowell was 16 years of age when his father died.

In 1842, Woodford G. McDowell married Elizabeth Lane. Woodford was 24, and Elizabeth was 19 when they married. Elizabeth was also born in Ohio. Woodford and Elizabeth McDowell had seven boys and two girls. Only the two girls lived to be adults.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth McDowell died at the age of 42 in 1865. The children of Woodford and Elizabeth McDowell were all adults when she died. Woodford McDowell was 47 when his first wife died.

Two years later, in 1867, Judge McDowell married Marion L. Stone. Both Woodford and Marion were 49 years of age when they married. They had no children.

By 1868, Woodford G. McDowell had observed several things. He saw how the little village of Avoca was wiped out when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks about five miles north of Avoca. Fairbury was founded and grew rapidly, so Avoca quickly disappeared. Woodford McDowell also saw how Pontiac

grew after it became the county seat in 1837. Woodford McDowell realized a great deal of money was made when relatively inexpensive farmland was converted into city building lots.

Judge McDowell decided to go to Nebraska and try to predict where he could start a new town that would be on a future railroad and become a county seat. Judge McDowell successfully founded the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska, and made a great deal of money. The new town was named after his hometown of Fairbury, Illinois, and was incorporated in 1872.

After just seven years of marriage, Marion McDowell died in Fairbury in 1874 at age 56. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery. At age 56, Judge McDowell became a widower for the second time. The same year his second wife died, Judge McDowell married Anna Elizabeth Chandler.

Anna Chandler was born in 1840 in Ohio. Unfortunately, her father died when she was just two years old. In the 1850 U.S. Census, she was ten years old and lived with her mother and two siblings in Lacon, Illinois.

By the 1860 census, Anna Chandler had married J. L. Mitchell and lived in Lacon, Illinois. Mr. Mitchell was a clerk born in New York. Ten years later, in the 1870 census, Mr. Mitchell disappeared from the scene. Mrs. Anna Mitchell lived with her 64-year-old mother, Levisa Chandler, in Lacon, Illinois. Mr. Mitchell and Anna Chandler apparently had no children.

After living in Fairbury for 13 years, Judge McDowell and his wife, Anna C. McDowell, decided to retire to Washington, D.C., in 1887. Anna McDowell had a widowed sister who married a judge and lived in Washington, D.C.

By the 1880s, Judge McDowell was a relatively wealthy man. He owned farmland in Nebraska and Illinois. When they lived in Fairbury, Anna McDowell started to get involved with many different women's philanthropic groups. When they settled in Washington, DC, Woodford and Anna McDowell joined the Metropolitan Methodist Church. Anna continued participating in many charitable groups.

Around 1895, a young woman named Mary Elizabeth Mellor began teaching at a missionary school in the village of Unalaska in the territory of Alaska. The City of Unalaska is the main

population center in the Aleutian Islands, west of what is now the State of Alaska. Miss Mellor was 22 years old in 1895.

In 1897, Ada Mellor joined her sister, Mary E. Mellor, as a teacher at Unalaska. The two sisters remained there until 1898. Anna McDowell's church group sponsored this type of missionary work.

In 1898, Judge McDowell was 80, and his wife, Anna McDowell, was 58 years of age. Anna never had any children of her own. Anna McDowell likely took an interest in Mary E. Mellor because she was like a daughter she never had. By 1898, Judge McDowell and his wife, Anna McDowell, adopted Mary E. Mellor. In the 1900 Census, 26-year-old Mary Elizabeth Mellor was listed as the adopted daughter. No record was found to indicate the adoption was legally recorded.

Evidence that Judge McDowell was wealthy is shown in the 1900 Census. In that Census, Virginia Roots was their 23-year-old black cook. Frederick Tyler was their 34-year-old black servant.

Judge Woodford G. McDowell died in 1904 in Washington, DC, at the age of 86. His wife, Anna McDowell, was 64 at the time of his death, and his adopted daughter, Mary E. Mellor, was 31.

Estate planning is challenging when you have multiple marriages and children. Judge McDowell left specific tracts of Nebraska farmland to his two living daughters in his will. He stipulated that his wife, Anna McDowell, receive the income from this farmland until she died. Judge McDowell left the balance of his estate to his wife, Anna McDowell. No mention was made of adopted daughter Mary E. Mellor.

Anna McDowell, Judge McDowell's third wife, lived for six more years after the Judge died. A 1910 newspaper article stated that Anna McDowell left $1,000 to each of Judge McDowell's surviving daughters. She also left the balance of her estate to her adopted daughter, Mary E. Mellor. Woodford and Anna McDowell were buried in the Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

A copy of Anna McDowell's will was recently obtained from Washington, D.C. officials. Unfortunately, her will does not contain a specific list of assets that the adopted daughter inherited. Anna McDowell likely owned the house in Washington, D.C., and farmland in the Fairbury area. Her adopted daughter, Mary E.

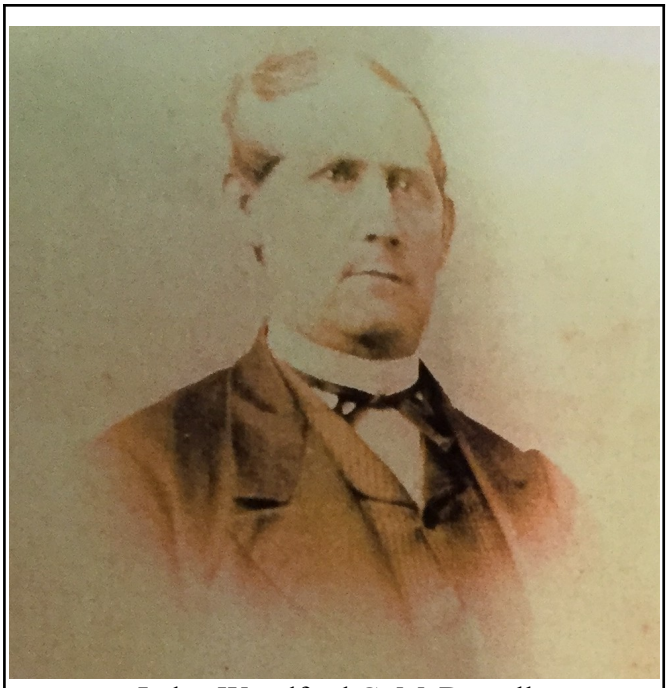
Mellor, probably received a significant inheritance when she died. The house owned by Judge McDowell in the Washington, D.C., area has been torn down and replaced by a modern-era building.

Because she was so active in many different philanthropic causes, Anna McDowell's death was widely reported in numerous newspapers.

Mary E. Mellor married briefly and then divorced. When she was 46, she married a second time to Ira Price, a 63-year-old University of Chicago professor. She continued her philanthropic work until she died in 1962 at the age of 88.

Judge McDowell was one of the pioneering settlers in the Fairbury area. He had an interesting family life, including three wives, nine children, and an adopted daughter who did missionary work in Alaska.

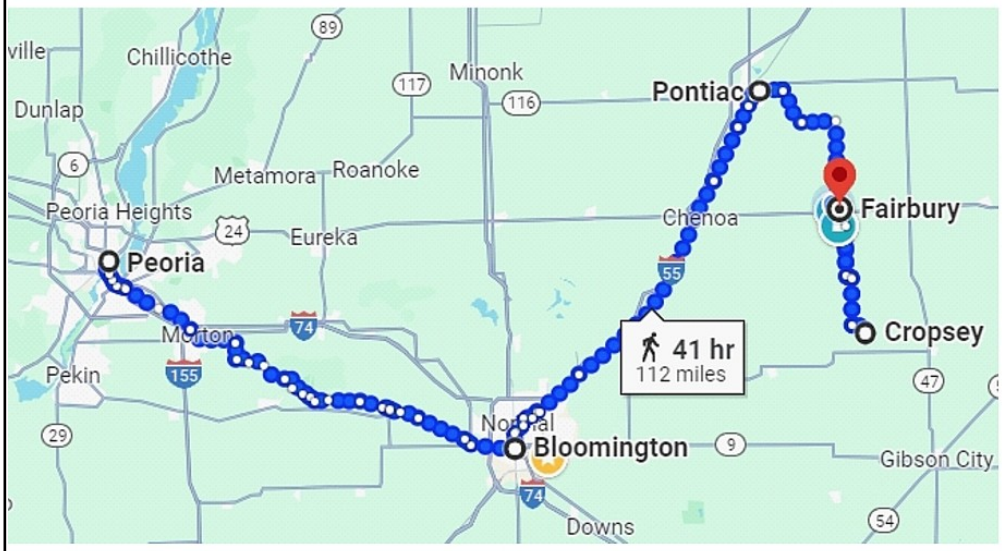
Photo of Judge Woodford G. McDowell



Judge Woodford G. McDowell

Map Showing Livingston County, Illinois, Connections to Nebraska

Livingston County, IL, connections to Nebraska



- Nelson Buck lived in Peoria, Bloomington, Pontiac.
- 1848 Gold Rush trips: William Stackpole of Fairbury
  Judge Henry Jones of Pontiac
- A.J. Cropsey from Fairbury to Lincoln, NE after 1865
- Judge McDowell of Fairbury founded Fairbury, NE 1869

Children of Nelson Buck in 1868

No evidence was found that Nelson Buck was aware in 1868 that his first son, Oliver P. Buck, had married and had five children in Cayuga County, New York. This meant that Nelson Buck had five grandchildren in New York that he did not know about.

In 1868, there were only two other surviving children of Nelson Buck. His daughter, Cordelia Buck, was 29 years old and married to Charles E. Watson. Nelson's first grandchild that he knew about was Clara May Watson (1865-1934), daughter of Charles and Cordelia Watson. Clara was three years old in 1868.

If Nelson Buck had continued to live in Pontiac, he would have had a second grandchild in 1870. Jessie N. Watson (1870-1963) was the second child of Charles and Cordelia Watson.

The other child that Nelson Buck was aware of was Willard P. Buck (1837-1909). Willard was 31 years of age and he never married. Willard served in the Civil War and eventually moved to Michigan.

Siblings of Nelson Buck in 1868

Nelson Buck had three siblings that had moved to either Nebraska or Kansas by 1868.

Nelson Buck's sister, Abigail Buck (1803-1885), had married Jacob Eaman (1805-1895). In the 1860 Census, Jacob and Abigail Buck lived in Wyoming in the Nebraska Territory. Jacob and Abigail had four children, but none of them were living at home in the 1860 Census.

Charles A. Buck Sr. (1810-1884), was a brother to Nelson Buck. Charles married Eunice Stewart (1821-1905) and they had 10 children. They moved to Jefferson County, Kansas in 1857.

Another brother to Nelson Buck was John Foster Buck (1815-1901). He married Mary Ann McFadden (1820-1910). In the 1860 census, they lived in Cass in the Nebraska Territory with Three Groves being the nearest Post Office. John was a farmer with seven children living at home.

Life Stage of Nelson Buck in 1868

In 1868, Nelson Buck was 60 years old. He had been a pioneer settler and surveyor in Peoria, Bloomington, and Pontiac. He was one of the founding fathers of Pontiac and the President of the first Board of Trustees. He was elected several times to be the Livingston County Surveyor.

The land rush in Livingston County was between 1852 and 1860 because of a federal law which granted free land primarily to veterans of the War of 1812. By 1860, all of the land in Livingston County had been purchased from the Federal Government and there was little need for surveyors.

It was three years since the Civil War ended in 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse when General Lee surrendered to General Grant.

In the future, in 1876, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer would be killed in Custer's Last Stand in southeast Montana. The U.S. Cavalry was defeated by Native American forces and 268 U.S. soldiers were killed.

In 1868, Nelson Buck enjoyed the company of his first known grandchild, Clara May Watson. In two more years, his second grandchild, Jessie N. Watson (1870-1963), would be born in Pontiac.

Nelson's only known son, Willard P. Buck, had survived serving in the Civil War and had moved to Michigan. Willard never married and died in Michigan.

Nelson Buck had never served in the military. He also had no exposure to Native Americans in New York, Peoria, or Pontiac. After the Black Hawk War ended in 1832, all Native Americans were forced to leave the state of Illinois.

Nelson Buck had a sister and brother living in Nebraska. He also had a brother living in Kansas, close to Nebraska.

Nelson Buck also likely knew about four other Livingston County residents that either had traveled across Nebraska or moved to that state. These men included William T. Stackpole, A. J. Cropsey, Judge Henry Jones, and Judge Woodford G. McDowell.

Nebraska had become a state a year earlier, in 1867. There would be a great need for surveyors in Nebraska.

Nelson Buck's financial situation in 1868 is not known. He still had to support himself and his 3rd wife. There was little demand for surveyors in Livingston County. Back in 1868, there was no Social Security program to provide an income in retirement. He may have accumulated personal debts also.

Rather than retire and enjoy his grandchildren in Pontiac, he decided to go on an adventure out West and survey in the dangerous Indian territory.

CHAPTER 7

1869

The Nelson Buck Party Trip to Nebraska in 1869

Lack of Definitive Story about the Buck Massacre

No definitive manuscript for the story of the Nelson Buck massacre is known to exist. There was no official state or government inquiry into the disappearance of the Nelson Buck party in 1869 within a few years of the event. Many of the stories about this trip were written over 60 years after the event occurred.

For this book, the story will be told in chronological fashion. Excerpts from later sources will be used to tell the story. The complete source material will be included in later chapters organized by the year it was published. Using all of this information will allow the reader to draw their own conclusions as to the most accurate version of this fascinating story.

Nelson Buck's First Attempt to Secure a Government Surveying Contract in 1867

According to an article published in the June 27, 1911, edition of the McCook Tribune, Nelson Buck first applied for a government contract to survey in Nebraska in late 1867. The title of this article was ***Massacre of the Nelson Buck Surveying Party.***

In this article, letters written to the government surveyor by Nelson Buck were transcribed and reported in the article. These letters are shown below.

> The archives of the surveyor general's office of Nebraska contain several letters from Nelson Buck.
>
> In one dated December 27, 1867, addressed to Surveyor General P. W. Hitchcock, the writer made application for a contract to do surveying in this state. He says he had, at that time, been in the business of surveying in Illinois for thirty-four years, and that he believed he was qualified to do such work.
>
> An interesting assertion in this letter is that he had letters of recommendation from Judge Treat, Abraham Lincoln, Jno. T. Stuart, and "many others among the most prominent of our great men."

No copy of the surveyor general's answer is available, but the following extract from Mr. Buck's reply, dated February 11, 1868, gives an intimation of what he may have said, and in the light of what afterwards occurred, seems almost prophetic:

> "As to the trouble with the Indians, I expected to encounter all ills. I am no more prepared to be killed than others are, but I think I am just as unlikely to suffer from their depredations as others, and am able to employ such force as will be likely to protect a party of surveyors as others are. In fact that part will not deter me from taking my chance. It is not the profit alone that would induce me to make the attempt, but the desire to be employed where I can see the west, so then so far as the fear of Indians are concerned, that has little or no weigh in this matter.
>
> If I can procure a contract for U. S. surveys I shall go prepared to perform all the requirements of the laws in such cases.
>
> Permit me to speak as though I was personally present. I can procure all the necessary recommendations as a competent surveyor. I can, if I have not now, procure all the necessary outfits and instruments. I can procure all the necessary assistants, and arms for defense as against the Indians and I can perform the work as well as any other man, as my long practice in surveying, I can say without fear of successful contradiction has given me a knowledge of all the various plans that must be carried out and I am anxious to be engaged in this business."

Before any contract was executed, there was a change of administration, and the next letter in the series, which is dated May 29, 1869, is addressed to Gen. R. R. Livingston.

In this letter Mr. Buck announces his intention of leaving Illinois for Nebraska within a few days. In the issue of the Nebraska Herald published at Plattsmouth, for June 24, 1869, it is reported, "that Nelson Buck, Esq., of Pontiac, Illinois, a brother of John F. Buck, of this county, has a contract under Surveyor General Livingston for establishing standard lines in the western part of the state."

Buck Letters to Surveyor General Indicate Buck Started Surveying in 1833

In the 1867 letter noted above, Buck wrote that he had been a practicing surveyor for 34 years. If we subtract 34 from 1867, this means Nelson Buck first started surveying in 1833.

Buck Recruits Young Pontiac Men to Join His Nebraska Surveying Party

Several articles written long after the Buck party vanished in 1869, recount that Nelson Buck took out an advertisement for young men to join his surveying party going to Nebraska.

Since the party left Pontiac on June 29, 1869, this ad would have been placed in the Pontiac Sentinel newspaper in 1869. Unfortunately, the oldest Sentinel archives we have start in 1871. No copy of Mr. Buck's advertisement is known to exist today. The available archives of the various Pontiac newspapers are shown below.

Source Name	Dates
Daily Leader	1971 – 2018
Daily Leader, The (Pontiac, IL)	2001 – Current
Daily Leader, The (Pontiac, IL)	2019 – Current
Pontiac Daily Leader	1896 – 1971
Pontiac Sentinel	1871 - 1897

Who Were the Pontiac Young Men in the Nelson Buck Surveying Party?

Unfortunately, the number of young men and their names is not well established. It is well established that two young men from Pontiac were in the Buck surveying party and they survived the massacre.

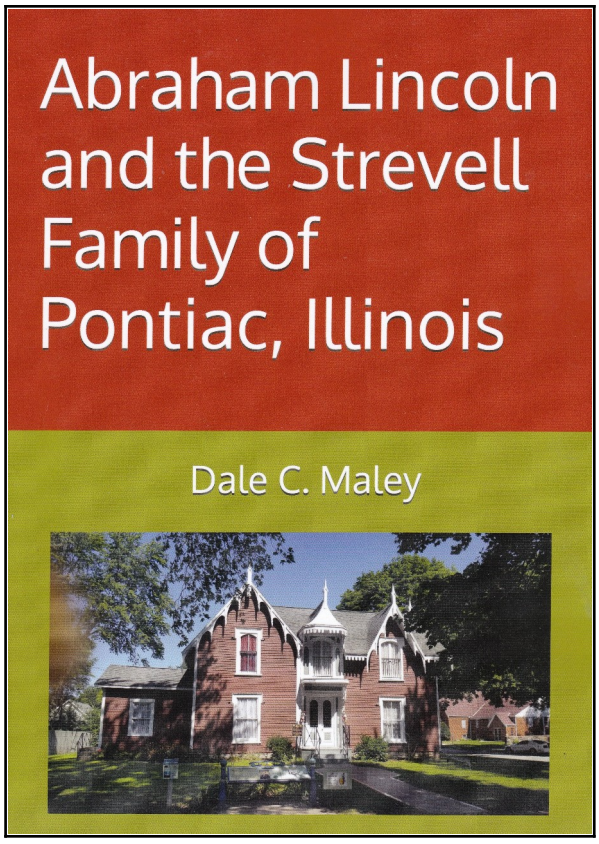
The first of these two young men was John K. Nettleton. He was born in 1849 in Michigan and was the son of Zelus H. Nettleton (1821-1857) and Elizabeth B. Kelly (1828-1902). Zelus Nettleton was quite a talented carpenter and he built two houses in Constantine, Michigan, that still stand in 2024. Zelus moved his family to Pontiac around 1855 and built what is now known as the "Strevell House" at 401 W. Livingston in Pontiac. Zelus had a watch making and repair business also in Pontiac.

Unfortunately, Zelus died in 1857 at the age of only 36. John K. Nettleton was eight years old when his father died. His mother then married Jason W. Strevell (1832-1903).

Jason W. Strevell did not adopt John K. Nettleton, and John kept his last name of Nettleton his whole life. On June 29, 1869, John K. Nettleton was 20 years of age.

Several sources recount that all the Pontiac young men in Nelson Buck's surveying party were age 17 and under. This is not true because John K. Nettleton was 20 years of age.

The Pontiac house that John K. Nettleton grew up in was later designated the Strevell House. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2023. The author researched and wrote a book about the history of the house, the Nettleton family, and the Strevell family titled Abraham Lincoln and the Strevell Family of Pontiac, Illinois. The complete life story of John K. Nettleton is part of this book.



Harry Buxton McGregor

The second survivor of the Nelson Buck surveying party was Harry Buxton McGregor. He was born in 1852 in Ottawa, Illinois. He was the son of John H. McGregor (1814-1856) and Mary Jane Buxton (1820-1901). John H. McGregor was one of the first lawyers to settle in Pontiac, according to the 1878 history book.

Like John K. Nettleton, Harry McGregor lost his father when he was only four years old.

On June 29, 1869, when he left Pontiac with the Nelson Buck surveying party, H. B. McGregor was 18 years of age.

Other Pontiac Members from 1911 Letter Written by Harry McGregor

In June of 1911, Harry McGregor wrote a letter documenting his involvement with the 1869 Nelson Buck party. In 1911, Harry McGregor was 59 years old and he was recounting a story that occurred 42 years earlier.

> They were Lycurgus Perry, John Nettleton, James Sager, David McFarland, H. B. McGregor and Frank McCulloch. Lycurgus Perry finally declined to go, but the rest of us started on the day set, in charge of Mr. Buck.

Other Pontiac Members of the Nelson Buck Party from McGregor Obituary

The author has found that obituaries are relatively accurate with respect to historical information. Harry McGregor died in 1937 in Pontiac at the age of 85. His complete obituary will be shown later in this book in a chapter pertaining to 1937.

In his 1937 obituary, it recounted that a total of five young Pontiac men accompanied Nelson Buck to Nebraska. The list of these five men is shown below.

1. Harry Buxton McGregor
2. John Nettleton
3. Frank McFarland
4. James Sager
5. Will McCullock

The obituary reported the five boys and Nelson Buck left Pontiac on June 29, 1869, for Nebraska. The obituary also reported none of the five boys were over the age of 16. This is incorrect because John Nettleton was 20 and Harry McGregor was 17.

Other Pontiac Members of the Nelson Buck Party from Nelson Buck FindaGrave Website

There is no source citation on this biography entry, but the list is shown below.

> He took with him six young men from Pontiac and area: Frank McFarlane, H. Buxton McGregor, John K. Nettleton, Will McCulloch, James Sager and Kurg Perry, all eager for adventure and none over 17 years of age. McFarlane was the son of a merchant tailor here; McGregor, from a prominent Pontiac family; Nettleton, the son of Mrs. J.W. Strevell; McCulloch, the son of Mrs. D. J. Taylor, Sager, from an Owego farm family, and Perry, who went as far as Chicago with the party where he was taken with “cold feet”, and came home.

Frank McFarlane Family Information

Using Ancestry.com, it was found that Frank McFarlane (1852-1869) was the son of William A. and Margaret McFarlane. William A. McFarlane was born in 1820 in Scotland. His death date is unknown.

Margaret McFarlane was born in 1828 in Ireland. She died in 1888 in an unknown location. William and Margaret McFarlane had four sons and one daughter.

In the 1870 Census, the McFarlane family was living in Pontiac. William McFarlane listed his occupation as a tailor. In the 1880 Census, the William McFarlane family moved to Braidwood.

Frank McFarlane was about 17 years of age when they left on the Nebraska surveying trip in 1869.

No Family Information Available for Three of the Pontiac Boys

No genealogical information could be found for Will McCullock or spelled as Will McCulloch. No further information could be found for James Sager or Kurg Perry.

Announcement that Nelson Buck Coming to Nebraska to Survey

The June 24, 1869, Nebraska Herald newspaper published the following story.

> We understand that Nelson Buck, Esq. Of Pontiac, Illinois, brother of John F. Buck, of this county, has a contract under Surveyor General Livingston for establishing standard lines in the western part of the state.

As noted earlier, one of Nelson Buck's brothers was John Foster Buck (1815-1901). He married Mary Ann McFadden (1820-1910). In the 1860 census, they lived in Cass County in the Nebraska Territory with Three Groves being the nearest Post Office. John was a farmer with seven children living at home.

Journey from Pontiac to Nebraska

The only known written account of this trip by one of the participants was in a letter written by Harry McGregor in 1911. In 1911, Harry McGregor was 59 years old and he was recounting a story that occurred 42 years earlier.

The portion of the letter dealing with the trip from Pontiac to Nebraska is shown below.

> In the spring of 1869 six of us were enlisted by Mr. Buck to accompany him on a government surveying expedition into Nebraska, then a newly created state. They were Lycurgus Perry, John Nettleton, James Sager, David McFarland, H. B. MacGregor and Frank McCulloch. Lycurgus Perry finally declined to go, but the rest of us started on the day set, in charge of Mr. Buck.
>
> We were all young men, all under age, and without the faintest ideas of the service we were undertaking, but looked upon it as a sort of a prolonged picnic. We traveled by rail to Chicago, and from there to Council Bluffs, Iowa. Then we followed the river down until opposite Plattsmouth, Nebraska.
>
> Here I came upon the first Indians I saw, camped in the brush. I was told they were Omahas and harmless. Certainly they paid no attention to us.
>
> We crossed over to Plattsmouth on a ferry boat by pulling a rope. I do not know what they charged, but it was considerable for an outfit like ours.
>
> Arriving in Plattsmouth, we camped out and were there for some time. Mr. Buck renewed his supplies there, gathered information, and recruited six other young fellows and a teamster. I regret I cannot, after this lapse of time, recall any of their names, although I can still recall their faces, equipment, etc., except the teamster, who was a tough looking, green eyed, curly headed, Polish Jew, by the name of Levy Mieroslowski.
>
> We were still in Plattsmouth July 4th. I remember the celebration there on that day, and the driving of the first spike in the construction of the Burlington railroad, which I witnessed on that day.
>
> We were in Plattsmouth possibly two weeks, but in due time started west over what was called the old government trail, passing

what was then Grand Island, on the south side of the Platte, a collection of half a dozen or more sod houses.

I recall the people there were very bitter toward all Indians. One old lady where I bought a little milk boasted that she had finished seven of the red devils by putting arsenic in the sugar and letting them steal it while she was absent, and their equipments were on the walls, too, to prove her story. The trip from Lincoln to Fort Kearney reservation was uneventful.

The trip from Lincoln to Fort Kearney reservation was uneventful, except for the fact that Mr. Buck could not locate a parallel which another crew had run and from which we were supposed to start.

For that reason, and to renew supplies, and to make requisition for arms and an escort, we camped at the reservation, I do not recall just how long we remained, but I know Major Pollock, who was in command of the post and other officers, and even enlisted men, insisted, if we went on without an escort and poorly armed as we were, we would all be massacred.

Last Written Communications by Nelson Buck

On June 27, 1911, the McCook Tribune published several letters written by Nelson Buck. The title of this article was ***Massacre of the Nelson Buck Surveying Party.***

In this article, letters written to the government surveyor by Nelson Buck were transcribed and reported in the article. The last letters written by Nelson Buck are shown below.

On July 21st, 1869, Mr. Buck wrote Gen. Livingston from Fort Kearney, as follows: "I regret that I did not procure arms, etc., while there (at Plattsmouth). I made application through Capt. Pollock to Gen. Auger, for leave to draw such as were needed, but did not get them.

"I will write today to Lieut. Mc-Clay for 6 Spencer rifles or needle breech loaders with 200 rounds each. Please write to Lieut. McClay or Gen. Auger, your consent for me to draw such (or others which may be had) at Fort McPherson. Some and indeed several of my company feel discouraged at hearing of Indians, out and through our district of country and want arms so that if we must fight Indians, all can take part in the matter.

> "We have lain here three days, hoping for some arms, although I knew the matter was rather doubtful, on account of irregularity in the present application. Still as we were here, we had hoped that the Gen. would issue the necessary orders."

So far as is known, this is the last word from Mr. Buck or from any member of his party except H. B. McGregor and John Nettleton, who left the party after it had gone into the field. No other members of the party were ever seen or heard from again.

Starting the Survey Without Proper Fire-Arms and without U.S. Army Support

Nelson Buck was unable to obtain adequate weapons and ammunition from the U.S. Army. He decided to start the survey anyway.

Harry McGregor recounted in 1911 what happened next on the trip.

> The days went by, but with no escort, no arms and no news. Finally, we started as we were. After about three days travel we pitched camp near the Republican, in what, as near as I can tell, is now Red Willow county, and prepared to run a parallel.
>
> Mr. Buck called Nettleton and myself to his tent and told us he was afraid there was considerable danger, and he wanted us to return to Fort Kearney reservation and await the requisition for arms and an escort, and come back with them to this camp. We found our way back to the fort readily enough, and reported to the commanding officer.
>
> Nettleton had no money, and I only three dollars, half of which I gave him. He hired out that same day to the man who was running an ox ferry across the Platte from Kearney City to Fort Kearney, getting three dollars for each trip.
>
> Nettleton agreed to come down to the bank of the Platte the next morning and talk across with me, but he did not, and I never saw him again. I received every attention from the commanding officer of the post, and in a day or so he told me I could get a job from the post trader if I wanted it, hauling wood into the post by ox team from Plum Creek crossing, two trips a week.
>
> I had never driven oxen, but claimed I had, and got the job. I did not know how to yoke them up, but the morning we were to start I told the young man who was going with me the truth about it, and told him if he would show me how this one morning I could do it and could drive all right, I was sure.

Nettleton and McGregor wisely did not leave the fort and return to the Nelson Buck survey party. Nettleton somehow got back home to Pontiac. McGregor worked to earn money for his return trip home to Pontiac.

Army Knew Nelson Buck Party Missing on September 26, 1869

In 1939, a book was published with the title of ***Chronological List of Engagements Between the Regular Army of the United States and Various Tribes of Hostile Indians Which Occurred During the Years 1790 to 1898, Inclusive***. This book was written by George W. Webb. A copy of this book may be accessed at Archive.Org at https://tinyurl.com/mrx8d9mw.

The entry for the Nelson Buck party is shown below.

> September 26 (1869)
> Prairie Dog Creek Kansas
> Trs. B, C, F, L, and M
>
> 5th U.S. Cav.' Trs. B, C, and M, 2nd U.S. Cav.; and 2 companies of Pawnee scouts. Lieut. Col. Thos. Duncan, 5th U.S. Cav., in command. Indians killed, 1. Indians captured, 1.
>
> Pursued the Indians to their village, consisting of 56 lodges, which was destroyed the following day. From the Indian prisoner it was ascertained that the band were all Sioux, under Pawnee Killer and Whistler. Some surveyor's instruments were also found and identified as belonging to Mr. Nelson Buck's surveying party, consisting of about 12 persons, all of whom have been recently murdered and their camp destroyed.

Nelson Buck Party Missing

The first mention in the Nebraska newspapers of something gone wrong with the Nelson Buck surveying party was on October 14, 1869. The Nebraska Herald published two articles about the Nelson Buck party.

> **FROM THE WEST**
>
> **Nelson Buck and Party Killed by Indians**
>
> Mr. Wm. E. Dougherty, Deputy Surveyor, whose letter describing his fight with the Indians the readers of the HERALD will remember, sends news to the Surveyor General's office at this place which leaves no room for doubt as to the fate of Mr. Nelson Buck's entire party of surveyors. Mr. B. entered the field in the latter part of July last, and up to 2d inst. had not established a single corner or run a foot of line. His track was found and an empty water-keg discovered near one of his camps, but no traces of the party. Coupling this with the fact that Gen. Duncan found two surveyor's tripods in the camp of Indians lately captured by him, we fear Mr. Buck and his party have fallen victims to the hostile Indians. Mr. Crocker, a nephew of Capt. L. B. Bennet of this place, and H. L. Levi were of this party. The others, ten in number, including Mr. Buck, were from Pontiac, Ill.
>
> Capt. Bennet, of this city, was at Omaha yesterday to get Gen. Auger to send out a party to ascertain if any further traces could be found of deputy surveyor Nelson Buck and party. Gen. Auger has agreed to send out a party of men as soon as Gen. Duncan returns from the expedition he is now engaged in.

The next newspaper article was published on October 16, 1869, in the Winona Daily Republican.

> —An Omaha dispatch of the 16th says: Reports are received here that a government surveying party under Nelson Buck, numbering 12 men, was massacred about 50 miles south of Fort McPherson. The surveying instruments, tools, and a portion of the camp equippage owned by the party were found. The reports are credited but lack full confirmation.

By October 16, 1869, the story had spread to Chicago with the Chicago Evening Post publishing the story below.

> **THE WEST**
>
> The Omaha Republican publishes a letter giving an account of the supposed massacre of a government surveying party numbering twelve men, under Nelson Buck. Their tools and camp equippage have been found, and there are several other circumstances which go to conform the supposition that they have been murdered about fifty miles south of Fort McPherson.

On October 18, 1869, the Rock Island Argus published this story.

> Chicago, Oct. 17 ─ A special dispatch from Omaha gives an account of a supposed massacre of a Government Surveying party under Nelson Buck, by Indians, south of Fort McPherson. The party contained twelve men, and as they are missing, it is thought they have been murdered, though no bodies have been found.

No Story in the Pontiac Sentinel

No story could be found in the Pontiac Sentinel about the lost Nelson Buck surveying party. The only story published was later after Willard Buck went to Nebraska and found some of his father's possessions.

Squaw Reported that Nelson Buck was Killed by Indians

The October 20, 1869, edition of the Missouri Republican published the following story.

> **THE FATE OF BUCK'S SURVEYORS**
>
> OMAHA, Oct. 19. ─Advices received at department headquarters from Col. Duncan commanding the recent expedition on the Republican river, leave no doubt that Nelson Buck and his party of surveyors were murdered by the Indians. Col. Duncan captured a squaw who reports that about the 20th of August, the band under Pawnee Killer and Whistler crossed the Republican between Frenchman's fork and Red William creek, when the party discovered two wagons, which they emptied of provision, and also capture the animals belonging to the team. No doubt the team was owned by the surveying party, which was subsequently massacred.

Nelson Buck Definitely Dead

The October 21, 1869, edition of the Buffalo Express published the following story.

> OMAHA, October 19.─There is no further doubt that the surveying party of twelve men under Nelson Buck, were murdered by the Indians on the Republican River in the latter part of August or early in September.

Two Nelson Buck Stories in the October 21, 1869 Nebraska Herald

> One of the scouting parties out under direction of Gen. Augur, recently discovered an old camp, a lot of camp equipment, some canned fruits, two tripods, and a silver fork with the name of James Jackson engraved thereon. This was between thirty and fifty miles south-east of Ft. McPherson. It is though probably this was Nelson Buck's camp. The camp had evidently been deserted. Some parts of a wagon were also found there.
>
> Mr. Willard P. Buck, of Pontiac, Ill., son of Nelson Buck, who is supposed to have been killed by the Indians this summer, arrived in town today. He will endeavor to secure an escort for the purpose of making a search for some trail of his father and party.

May Be Survivors of the Buck Party

The following article expressed a hope that some of the men were still alive.

> Omaha Daily Herald
> October 28, 1869
>
> A Surveying Party Murdered by Indians
>
> Some later information has been received relative to the fate of Nelson Buck, of Cass County, and a party of 12 with whom he set out in June last to survey a portion of the public lands in western Nebraska.
>
> Up to mid-July he maintained an irregular correspondence with his friends in the settlements, but since then no tidings have been received.
>
> On Oct. 3, Lt. Hawkins found a deserted camp, two tripods, and some canned fruits about 30 miles southeast of Ft. McPherson. A squaw captured Sept. 26 by Gen. Duncan's cavalry reported: About August 20, when cherries were first ripe, a band of Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler crossed the Republican to move over to Beaver between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow river. Four young men were far in advance. One of them came back and reported the other three killed by white men. Squaws and children went at once into the bushes. The men went toward the Beaver and did not come back until dusk. They said they killed five and destroyed two wagons and the rest of the white men hid in bushes.
>
> All the animals and rations were taken. The Indians are the same that have been punished this summer by Gen. Carr, Col. Roynel and Duncan in turn. There is a possibility the six white men are yet alive.

Nelson Buck Story Appears in a Bloomington, Illinois, Newspaper

The November 4, 1869, edition of the Weekly Leader in Bloomington published the following story.

> AN OLD SETTLER GONE.—J. H. Spaulding informs that Nelson Buck, favorably known to many of our older citizens as County Surveyor, some twenty-five years ago, was killed and scalped somewhere near Montana City, in Montana Territory, some time since. He was at the time of his death employed in surveying Government lands. He was quite advanced in years and respected by all who knew him.

Last Hope Gone for Buck Surveying Party

On November 4, 1869, the Nebraska Herald published the following story.

> **FROM THE WEST**
>
> **The Buck Surveying Party—The Last Hope Gone**
>
> Major-General Auger returned from Fort McPherson yesterday. Col. Duncan's command had returned from an expedition to the Republican River. — Young Mr. Buck (a son of Nelson Buck, of the surveying party, supposed to have been massacred by the Indians some time since,) returned with the command. He reports having found at the camp last occupied by the surveying party, a quantity of papers belonging to his father,and other articles, which left no doubt as to the fate of the entire party. Search was made for the bodies of the unfortunate men, but no traces could be found. It is supposed that a portion or all of the party were captured and carried off by the Indians, to meet death in some other locality.
>
> There can be no longer a reasonable doubt that the twelve men composing this party have been massacred by the Indians.

Results of the Willard Buck Search for Nelson Buck and Party

After Willard Buck finished his investigation in Nebraska, he wrote a letter to the U.S. Army. Willard concluded that based upon the possessions he found, his father, Nelson Buck, was dead. Willard's letter was published in several different newspapers. The version below was published on November 11, 1869, by the St. Joseph Weekly Union.

THE BUCK SURVEYING PARTY

All Doubts as their Fate Cleared Away—Letter from Mr. Buck's Son to Gen. Emery.

The subjoined letter from the son of Mr. Nelson Buck, the missing surveyor, who accompanied a detachment of General Duncan's command from Fort McPherson on a search for his father and companions, toward the latter end of last month, corroborates previous reports, which left little doubt of the massacre by the Sioux of the entire party. The Omaha Republican thinks from the fact that no bones were found among the debris of camp equipment discovered, there is a bare possibility that the unfortunate men may be prisoners of the red skins; but, to those acquainted with Indian character, such a presumption gives little hope of their safety:

FORT MCPHERSON, Nebraska
November 2, 1869

Gen. Emory—Dear Sir: In relation to the search for Nelson Buck's Surveying party, I am fully satisfied that it was his party that was killed on the Brand.

I found three wagons (or parts of them), which, from the description that I got of them, are undoubtedly his wagons; and I also found the transit box (smashed) and the solar compass, supposed to be his. Some parts of harness, pieces of book covers and also one small piece of paper or bill, with the name of Buck on one side and some figures on the other—which, I suppose, was part of a bill of goods bought of Clarke & Plummer, Plattsmouth, Nebraska.

The tripods found by General Duncan, I am sure, are the old transit tripods, and the Spencer carbine found also by General Duncan's party, I think is the one he took along with him when he left home.

These are the facts as far as I know, in relation to the party, as no bones were found to tell whether the party were killed or taken prisoner.

Signed

W. P. Buck

Map Showing Key Locations in Nebraska

•Site of Nelson Buck Massacre near Marion, NE

•Many newspaper articles from McCook, NE

CHAPTER 8

1870 to 1910

Two Chiefs Found that Committed Nelson Buck Massacre

The January 19, 1870, edition of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle published a story about identifying the Indian Chiefs that committed the Nelson Buck Massacre.

> **THE INDIAN MASSACRE**
>
> **Discovery of the Murderers**
>
> Omaha, Neb. Jan. 19th
>
> A Herald letter from the Whetstone Agency states that it is positively ascertained that Pawnee Killer and Whistler were the Chiefs engaged in the massacre of the Nelson Buck Surveying party, on the Republican river, last fall. Pawnee Killer is now encamped with his band near Whetstone, drawing rations from the Government, whose servants he so foully murdered. The writer calls on the authorities to arrest the Chiefs and the Indians engaged in the massacre.

1872 Sentinel Story about Buffalo Bill Cody

On April 25, 1872, the Pontiac Sentinel published the story shown below.

April 25, 1872
Pontiac Sentinel

Letter from Buffalo Bill

Mrs. McFarlane, whose son was killed by the Indians, with the rest of Mr. Buck's Surveying party, has received the following letter, which we publish with her permission.

Fort McPherson, Neb.
April 18, 1872

Mrs. McFarlane, ─Dear Madam─Your letter inquiring after the surveying party of Mr. Buck's is at hand. I have thoroughly investigated the facts regarding the disappearance of the entire party. His son came here the fall after Mr. Buck was killed, and the government furnished him soldiers to search for the remains of his father and party.

I went with the party, and we found the wagons and several other things which belonged to the missing men. Mr. Buck found a letter belonging to his father, so he came to the conclusion that his father had been murdered by the Indians, and was anxious to return.

I never saw a son who took so little interest in hunting for his father. It seemed to me as though he did not care whether he found his father or not. He used no energy in hunting for his father's remains, or he could have been found then, and your mind set at ease long ago. Seeing the lack of exertion on his part, and we being strangers to all, we returned with only the supposition that they were murdered.

I told Mr. Buck when he left that if he would write to me so I could keep posted of his whereabouts, I would find out by the Indians all about his father and party. I asked every Indian I supposed knew anything of them, until I found the guilty ones. It pains me to inform you that they were killed. They died bravely and fighting, and the Indians paid dearly for killing them, for before they were all killed, they had killed several Indians.

The white men got into a little bend in the creek and were, all killed together. A short time ago I saw most of the Indians who were in the fight. They belonged to the Sioux tribe.

Mr. Buck never wrote to me, and I did not know where to write to him, to tell him how his father was killed. I will probably be in that section of the country this summer, and if I am, will surely collect as many of the remains as possible and bury them. I am sorry for anyone who have their near and dear ones murdered by these treacherous Indians. Several of my most loved relations have fell by the cruel hand of the Indian, but many of them have been made to pay for their cruel act.

I am sorry I could not give you hope. You asked for my candid opinion, and not wishing to deceive you, I must acknowledge there is no hope of you ever meeting your son again on earth.

Wishing you a long and a happy life, I subscribe myself,

Wm. F. Cody

What Ever Happened to John K. Nettleton?

John K. Nettleton returned to Pontiac after the Nelson Buck Expedition.

In 1870, the year after the expedition, John K. Nettleton married Olive Potter in Livingston County. John was 21 and Olive was 17 when they married.

By the time of the 1880 U.S. Census, John and Olive Nettleton had moved to Joliet, Illinois. In that Census, John listed his occupation as carpenter, the same occupation that his father, Zelus Nettleton, practiced. Their nine year old son Wilson H. Nettleton and their one year old daughter Lizzie K. Nettleton lived in the household.

The September 13, 1888, edition of Iron Age magazine had a brief notation about John K. Nettleton.

> J. K. Nettleton retires on account of ill health.

On March 10, 1942, Charles Nettleton Strevell, the brother of John K. Nettleton wrote a letter in which he stated the last time he heard from John K. Nettleton was during the World's Fair in Chicago. At that time, John K. Nettleton said he had moved from Minnesota to Oregon and he was looking for work.

Unfortunately, Chicago had two World's Fairs. The first was in 1893 and the second was in 1933. We do know know which World's Fair in Chicago that Charles Nettleton Strevell was referring to in his 1942 letter.

The author has spent many hours researching to try to figure out the death dates and locations of death for both John K. Nettleton and his wife Olive Potter. At this time, the author has not answered these questions.

Descendants of John K. Nettleton and Olive Potter visited the Strevell House in Pontiac a couple years ago. These descendants have also had no success solving the mystery of what happened to John and Olive Potter. The only things we know for sure is that John and Olive Nettleton were living in Joliet in 1880 and John K. Nettleton retired in 1888 on account of ill health.

Buffalo Bill Cody Talks to Mother of William McFarlane in Streator

Buffalo Bill's touring show put on a performance in Streator, Illinois in 1881. According to the 1880 U.S. Census, the mother of William McFarlane was living in Braidwood. Streator is 32 miles north of Pontiac and 60 miles southwest of Braidwood. A copy of the article is shown below.

The Streator Times

September 14, 1881

—Buffalo Bill combination played to a good house last night and gave a first-class entertainment. The management was very pleased with the receipts—being larger than at Ottawa, and thinks that Oriental hall will hold more than 200 people, Mr. Sherwood to the contrary not withstanding. The combination will visit Streator again later in the season.

—Mrs. William A. McFarlane, whose son was massacred with the buck surveying party in 1869 had an interview with Buffalo Bill yesterday in regard thereof. Four young men from Pontiac were in the party, viz: Frank McFarlane, Wm. McCullough, Buckskin McGregor and John Nettleton, all boys from sixteen to nineteen years of age. McGregor and Nettleton deserted the party and returned home, while the remaining ones went on some fifty miles the other side of Ft. Kearney, in Nebraska, to do some surveying.

While at work they were attacked by a band of Sioux Indians, and after a futile resistance every man in the party—some twelve at that time—was horribly massacred. A son of Buck was commissioned to go in search of the remains and a company of soldiers, and Buffalo Bill as scout, were detailed to assist him. Owing to the danger from hostile Indians the search was abandoned by Buck, and the party returned. About three years thereafter Buffalo Bill, while scouting the plains came upon the bleached bones of nine of the bodies, and had them carefully buried.

Another Account of Visit Between Buffalo Bill and Mrs. McFarlane in 1881

I was unable to verify which newspaper published the story below.

> Likely the Pontiac Daily Leader or Streator Times
> September 27, 1881
>
> An incident was connected with Buffalo Bill's visit to Streator, which brought up recollections of an Indian massacre that occurred in Wyoming when that country was only a wilderness. The Buck surveying party, from Pontiac, as well known, was massacred at some distance from Fort Kearny, Wyoming Territory, in the fall of 1869, and no certain information concerning it was obtained until several years afterward.
>
> Frank, sixteen-year-old son of Wm. Farlane of Streator, then Pontiac, was a member of the surveying party, and his parents waited for years some tidings of his whereabouts. Mr. Cody, when written to, interested himself in the mateer, went over the grounds of the massacre and was the first white man who saw the remains. Out of the twelve in the party, nine bodies were found in an unrecognizable condition, and given a decent burial. Full details were kindly sent to the waiting parents at different times by Mr. Cody, and, when he arrived in Streator Tuesday, Mrs. McFarlane called on him to hear the story of his search for her lost boy and to thank him for his kind services. The meeting of the border hero and parent, bereaved under such peculiar circumstances, was singularly romantic, though sad.

1887 Death of Son-in-Law to Nelson Buck

Cordelia Buck, daughter of Nelson Buck, married Charles E. Watson and they had three children in Pontiac. Mr. Watson died in 1887 and his obit is shown below.

Mr. Watson was apparently an alcoholic. It is ironic that Nelson Buck lobbied against the sale of alcohol during the early days of Pontiac history, and his son-in-law later died of alcoholism.

Pontiac Sentinel
May 6, 1887

Another Sudden Death

Thursday morning the dead body of Charles E. Watson was discovered lying by the rear platform of Arman & Reed's store, the head being turned back and somewhat under the body and the neck broken.

He had been about as usual Wednesday and half-past seven or eight o'clock in the evening went into the store and sat down by the stove conversing for awhile with Jerry Collins, and others. About nine o'clock he stepped out of the back door, and not returning it was supposed had gone home. Nothing further was thought at the store, except when Mr. Arman was shutting up for the night he discovered a hat which he thought to be Mr. Watson's and could not account for its presence there, but gave the matter no further attention, until Mr. Randolph, at about half past six yesterday morning discovered the body as above stated showing every evidence of having lain there all night. The coroner was notified and a jury impaneled. After taking evidence a verdict of accidental death by falling from a platform was rendered.

Charles E. Watson was about 50 years of age, came of a good family, and was respectably connected in this city; and but for strong drink might have been a very useful man in the community. This habit he had fought hard, but it seemed to have gained complete control of him and it no doubt was the cause of his death as he had been drinking that day and for several days previous. He was a man of kind impulses, peaceable and honest in his intentions. He leaves a highly respected wife and three children who have the sympathy of the entire community. The funeral services will take place today.

Third Husband of Maria Tracy Dies in 1897

Nelson Buck was Maria Tracy's second husband. After his death in 1869, she married Elijah B. Owen in 1877. Mr. Owen died in 1897 and his obituary is shown below.

Star Gazette
July 6, 1897

DEATH OF ELIJAH OWEN

In Pontiac, Ill., Yesterday─Formerly a Big Flats Resident

Elijah B. Owen died at his home in Pontiac, Ill., July 5 in the ninetieth year of his age. Mr. Owen was born in Big Flats in the year 1808 and was a resident of Chemung county till 1878 when he went to Pontiac where he has since resided.

He is survived by the widow and three children, William Sylvester and a daughter Ida Park.

He was a brother of Stephen T. Owen of Big Flats and George H. Owen of No. 316 Lake street, Elmira.

1901 Memories of Nelson Buck by Pontiac's First Mayor

On March 2, 1901, the Leader published a story written by the first Mayor of Pontiac. The portion of the story about Nelson Buck is shown below.

> Pontiac Daily Leader
> March 2, 1901
>
> **REMINISCENCES HISTORICAL**
>
> Early Days in Pontiac and Livingston County—Interesting Items from Pontiac's First Mayor
>
> Another early settler was Nelson Buck, who came here about or before the time when the town was platted. He married the widow of Augustus Fellows—one of the pioneers of this section. Buck was more or less engaged in mercantile pursuits, but was more generally known and remembered as a practical surveyor.
>
> He was a thorough, public spirited citizen and many of the early improvements and enterprises of the town were conceived and fostered by him. He was one of the first officers of the township and village organizations. Of sanguine temperament, he revolted against opposition. He could not countenance opposition; let, all in all, he was a benevolent, kind hearted citizen, and the early years of Pontiac were benefited by his counsels and official acts.
>
> R. W. BABCOCK
> Pontiac. III..
> March 1, 1901

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show Visits Pontiac in September of 1901

The Pontiac Daily Leader published a story about Buffalo Bill's show visiting Pontiac. A copy of this article is shown below.

Pontiac Daily Leader
September 28, 1901

WITH THE SHOW

BUFFALO BILL HERE IN ALL HIS WESTERN GLORY

Great Aggregation of Fine Horsemen from all Parts of the World

Buffalo Bill's Wild West aggregation reached Pontiac shortly after six o'clock this morning via the Illinois Central from Springfield on a train of two sections of 25 cars each.

With all the precision of a great army in the field the big show went into camp at the Smith show lot across the Wabash on East Howard street. Each band of Indians, each squad of soldiers, each "bunch" of cowboys were under the direct charge of a commanding officer. In almost less time than it takes to tell it everybody was settled into quarters, and long before noon no one else could have told but that the camp had been there a month or more, so well regulated was everything.

This morning the street parade took place. The route was lined with people, who enthusiastically received the splendid showing of magnificent horses and the world's most interesting people. Col. Cody, the same stalwart, wiry, keen-eyed, clear-headed "Buffalo Bill" of a Score or more years ago, when he fought the Indian chief, Yellow Hand, to the death in a bloody knife duel, rode at the head of the parade. Except that his hair is fast whitening, there is nothing about him to indicate he is within ten years of man's allotted time of "three score years and ten."

A few general ideas were shockingly dispelled in the minds of those who witnessed the arrival of the show. The cowboys, who are always pictured as chewing huge hunks of tobacco and filling the air with profanity, smoked cigars like gentlemen and never uttered a loud word. The Indian braves, according to the story books, should have immediately lighted their pipes upon their arrival on the show grounds and allowed the squaws to pitch the wagons, carry the water, build the fires, etc.; but they did nothing of the sort. Like well-trained Pontiac paleface husbands, they went to work with a will putting up their tents and doing the chores. One good looking young warrior got a roasting in the Sioux language from his squaw, and after that held the "pappoose" as meekly as could be. The pictured Boers are all fat fellows, with huge beards, but the real ones with the show are not fat, and only two out of fourteen wear whiskers. The others are clean shaven, and several are mere youths.

The British soldiery is not done up in fiery red coats and huge bearskin shakes, as the picture books show. They wear the yellow khaki uniforms and soft felt campaign hats, just like the American soldiers now in Cuba and the Philippines.

Sentiment swayed the audience at the performance this afternoon when the detachment of United States cavalry rode into the arena, and the soldiers of the Kaiser and the Canadian Mounted Rifles were well received. The Canadian Strathcona horse, the mounted police of Canada, gave a magnificent exhibition of riding and drilling while mounted and the Indian Chiefs with their war paint and feathers rode their little ponies desperately hard to win the honors and glory of the race in which they took part.

The old features of the Wild West, the prairie emigrant schooner attacked while crossing the plains by marauding Indians, the Indians repulsed, the United States artillery drill by veterans from Captain Thorpe's Battery B. Fourth Regiment, the lasso and feats of horsemanship by Mexicans, the Arab horsemen, the live saving drill by a detachment from one of the life saving stations on the Jersey coast, all served to keep up the enthusiasm until Buffalo Bill himself, mounted on a magnificent charger which answers every pressure of his fingers on the bridle rein, rode into the arena and circled the ring to the music of cheers from a thousand voices. The life saving crew of the United States attracted a great deal of attention in their exhibit of how thousands of lives are saved each year.

Then Miss Annie Oakley broke glass balls and clay pigeons with her customary expertness this afternoon and a pony express rider gave an exhibition of how quickly he could change his mount and be off in delivering mail matter in the Wild West. "Johny" Baker assumed fancy poses while breaking clay pigeons two at a time, shooting backward, from kneeling position, lying on his back, holding the rifle over his head, and from many other positions.

The bronco "buster" gave exhibitions of how to control and break wild horses, and Cody himself, armed with a rifle and mounted on a fast speeding horse gave exhibitions of sharp shooting that won the plaudits of the crowd. The performance ended with the "Battle of Tien-Tsien," in which the entire company with the exception of the Indians took part.

Strangest of all, the canvass men are not loudly profane, whiskey-soaked red-nosed brigands, who would commit cold blooded murder for fifteen cents if they wanted a drink real bad, but, on the other hand, are quiet, well dressed, gentlemanly fellows, who seldom if ever use a bad word, and who, to a great extent, have "cut out" booze as being their natural enemy. The Indians, which one would naturally supposed to be the wildest and hardest to control, give the least trouble and are as tractable and obedient as the average house servant. Mr. Dexter Fellows, the press agent of the show, is a mild mannered, ministerial looking chap, with an inexhaustible fund of wit and good humor. He is called "the parson" by

the cowboys, because he wears a frock coat and a white tie. But he is a jolly specimen of a sky pilot.

The management stated this afternoon that the performance this evening would be an exact counterpart and reproduction of the one this afternoon and in no way would one of the features be slighted. All intending to go this evening will see one of the finest performance of its kind in the world and will be assured that they saw as much as the audience this afternoon.

Widow of Nelson Buck Died in 1909 in Pontiac

Maria Tracy was married to Nelson Buck when he went missing in 1869. Because she was a pioneering resident of Pontiac, the Daily Leader published a relatively long obituary for her.

In 2009, Barbara Sancken used this 1909 obituary as a primary source for the very interesting story she wrote about the life of Maria Tracy. See the future chapter about the 2009 Sancken story to read the information from the obituary.

1909 Letter from Buffalo Bill Cody to Editor of the Pontiac Daily Leader

The Leader published a letter from Buffalo Bill Cody. The year 1909 marked 40 years since the Nelson Buck surveying party disappeared in 1869 in Nebraska. A copy of the article is shown below.

Pontiac Daily Leader
July 29, 1909

COL. CODY TELLS OF NELSON BUCK PARTY

Says He Recovered the Bodies and All Were Given Respectable burial at Plum Creek, Nebraska

Below appears an interesting communication from H. B. McGregor, of this city, relative to the Nelson Buck surveying party, which went into the wilds of Nebraska in 1869 and never returned, save two, and one of whom was Mr. McGregor, who is a resident here, and is at present the only surviving member of that party.

Colonel Cody was a United States scout at the time and it was he and his party who, some time after the murder of the Nelson Buck party by the Indians, obtained their bodies and gave them a decent burial.

At the time he made report to the government and the family here was communicated with and advised of the disposition of the bodies, though the public did not generally know of it and this is the first publication of the real facts:

Editor Leader: I had the pleasure of an interview with Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) last evening and he requested me to write up a statement from him as to the facts relating to the Nelson Buck party in 1869. I had always understood that the bodies of this party were never recovered, but Colonel Cody says he found all the bodies and that none of them had been burned, so it was not likely any of them had been taken alive. They were, of course, scalped and mutilated, but presumably after death. Colonel Cody himself helped to bury all of them and the bodies now rest near the headwaters of Plum Creek, Neb.

After performing this duty, later, with his command, he trailed the Indians to their village, killed quite a number of them- all they

could- and dispersed the balance. They found in the village some of Mr. Buck's surveying instruments, so he knew he got the right Indians. These hostiles were under the leadership of Roman Nose, one of the most famous fighting chiefs of the Sioux. They consisted of dog soldiers (outlaw Indians) of the most desperate character.

The survivors of this band were followed up by Colonel Forsyth's and other commands, until finally Roman Nose was killed and the band practically exterminated.

Colonel Cody wishes the Leader to publish this statement that the few remaining relatives and friends of this unfortunate expedition might know that the government not only buried their dead, but thoroughly avenged them.

This same band of bad Indians was just on the point of massacring another surveyor's outfit from Leavenworth, Kansas, consisting of eleven people. Colonel Cody's troop rescued them in time, so the expedition accomplished that much more than was expected of them.

Colonel Cody is the last and best of his type whom I have known and the debt that the nation owes them for their pioneer work on the frontier can never be estimated nor fully appreciated.

H. B. McGregor
Pontiac, Ill.
July 29, 1909

CHAPTER 9

1911 to 1916

1911 Harry McGregor Letter Recounting Story of Buck Surveying Party

There were only two survivors of the Nelson Buck surveying party and they were John K. Nettleton and Harry McGregor. According to the 1880 U.S. Census, John K. Nettleton and his wife had moved from Pontiac to Joliet. John K. Nettleton never lived in Pontiac after 1880. John K. Nettleton was still alive in 1911, but Harry McGregor may have assumed he was dead, and that he was the only survivor of the Henry Buck surveying party.

In 1911, Harry McGregor was 59 years old and lived in Pontiac. It was 42 years after the 1869 Nelson Buck expedition to Nebraska.

In 1911, Harry McGregor wrote a letter documenting his memories of the Nelson Buck expedition. A copy of his letter was published in the June 6, 1911, edition of the McCook Tribune in Nebraska. This article with the letter is shown below.

> The McCook Tribune
> June 6, 1911
>
> **The Buck Surveying Party**
>
> Sometime during the month of July or August.., 1869, a surveying party under the direction of Nelson Buck of Pontiac, Illinois, consisting of eleven or twelve men, disappeared on the plains of Southwestern Nebraska.
>
> While nothing was seen of the party after it left the vicinity of Fort Kearney, investigations made in the fall of 1869 leave no room for doubt that the party was killed by the Indians. The event is of special interest to residents of Red Willow county, because it has been definitely determined that the massacre occurred in this county, probably on Beaver creek, a short distance west of where the town of Marion now is.

Mr. H. B. MacGregor. who was originally one of the party, but who was sent back to the Fort after they had gone into the field, is, so far as is known, the only survivor. The following account of his adventures, written by himself, was recently received:

> In the spring of 1869 six of us were enlisted by Mr. Buck to accompany him on a government surveying expedition into Nebraska, then a newly created state. They were Lycurgus Perry, John Nettleton, James Sager, David McFarland, H. B. MacGregor and Frank McCulloch. Lycurgus Perry finally declined to go, but the rest of us started on the day set, in charge of Mr. Buck.
>
> We were all young men, all under age, and without the faintest ideas of the service we were undertaking, but looked upon it as a sort of a prolonged picnic. We traveled by rail to Chicago, and from there to Council Bluffs, Iowa. Then we followed the river down until opposite Plattsmouth, Nebraska.
>
> Here I came upon the first Indians I saw, camped in the brush. I was told they were Omahas and harmless. Certainly they paid no attention to us.
>
> We crossed over to Plattsmouth on a ferry boat by pulling a rope. I do not know what they charged, but it was considerable for an outfit like ours.
>
> Arriving in Plattsmouth, we camped out and were there for some time. Mr. Buck renewed his supplies there, gathered information, and recruited six other young fellows and a teamster. I regret I cannot, after this lapse of time, recall any of their names, although I can still recall their faces, equipment, etc., except the teamster, who was a tough looking, green eyed, curly headed, Polish Jew, by the name of Levy Mieroslowski.
>
> We were still in Plattsmouth July 4th. I remember the celebration there on that day, and the driving of the first spike in the construction of the Burlington railroad, which I witnessed on that day.
>
> We were in Plattsmouth possibly two weeks, but in due time started west over what was called the old government trail, passing what was then Grand Island, on the south side

of the Platte, a collection of half a dozen or more sod houses.

I recall the people there were very bitter toward all Indians. One old lady where I bought a little milk boasted that she had finished seven of the red devils by putting arsenic in the sugar and letting them steal it while she was absent, and their equipments were on the walls, too, to prove her story. The trip from Lincoln to Fort Kearney reservation was uneventful.

The trip from Lincoln to Fort Kearney reservation was uneventful, except for the fact that Mr. Buck could not locate a parallel which another crew had run and from which we were supposed to start.

For that reason, and to renew supplies, and to make requisition for arms and an escort, we camped at the reservation, I do not recall just how long we remained, but I know Major Pollock, who was in command of the post and other officers, and even enlisted men, insisted, if we went on without an escort and poorly armed as we were, we would all be massacred.

The days went by, but with no escort, no arms and no news. Finally, we started as we were. After about three days travel we pitched camp near the Republican, in what, as near as I can tell, is now Red Willow county, and prepared to run a parallel.

Mr. Buck called Nettleton and myself to his tent and told us he was afraid there was considerable danger, and he wanted us to return to Fort Kearney reservation and await the requisition for arms and an escort, and come back with them to this camp. We found our way back to the fort readily enough, and reported to the commanding officer.

Nettleton had no money, and I only three dollars, half of which I gave him. He hired out that same day to the man who was running an ox ferry across the Platte from Kearney City to Fort Kearney, getting three dollars for each trip.

Nettleton agreed to come down to the bank of the Platte the next morning and talk across with me, but he did not, and I never saw him again. I received every attention from the

commanding officer of the post, and in a day or so he told me I could get a job from the post trader if I wanted it, hauling wood into the post by ox team from Plum Creek crossing, two trips a week.

I had never driven oxen, but claimed I had, and got the job. I did not know how to yoke them up, but the morning we were to start I told the young man who was going with me the truth about it, and told him if he would show me how this one morning I could do it and could drive all right, I was sure.

This he did, being a good fellow. His name, I regret to say, has escaped me, but we got along all right for a number of trips. I learned long afterwards that it was a most dangerous job, the Sioux using that crossing and killing nearly every wood hauler who had tried it. We did not see an Indian, though we heard them often at night as we laid hid near the crossing.

Evans Brothers of St. Louis came along there soon, and as I heard nothing from my companions, and nothing as to an escort or arms, and they were going west, I hired to Evans as a rider at one dollar a day, and found this was a large and well equipped outfit. There were a number of well known western men with this crew as scouts.

I remained with this cattle outfit until they reached the foothills, when I quit them and started back alone and on foot for home. I had no serious trouble. I slept at night on the islands in the Platte, and traveled days. I often heard Indians and gun shots, but did not see one nor was I seen by them on this trip.

When opposite North Platte I swam over to the north side, and there found some parties with three male teams going east. They were without a driver for one of the teams and I took that job for the transportation. I quit them at Columbus, Nebraska, and from there on home nothing of especial interest occurred.

June 27, 1911, Follow-Up McCook Tribune Story with Nelson Buck Letters

About three weeks after the June 6, 1911, story with the letter from Harry McGregor, the McCook Tribune ran another story with copies of letters written by Nelson Buck to the Surveyor General. The first part of the story was published on June 27 and the second part on June 29, 1911. A copy of this article is shown below.

The McCook Tribune
June 27 and June 29, 1911

MASSACRE OF THE NELSON BUCK SURVEYING PARTY

As Told In the Official Correspondence and Newspaper Accounts of the Time

In the issue of The Tribune for Tuesday, June 6, was printed the substance of a letter from Mr. H. B. L McGregor, of Pontiac, Illinois, who, so far as is known, is the only survivor of the Nelson Buck surveying party, the members of which, with the exception of Mr. McGregor and; one other, were killed by the Indians in the summer of 1869.

The real story of the massacre will probably never be told, but enough has been discovered to leave no doubt that the bones of at least ten of the twelve men who started on the expedition were left to bleach upon the plains of southwestern Nebraska somewhere within the boundaries of what is now Red Willow county.

The archives of the surveyor general's office of Nebraska contain several letters from Nelson Buck.

In one dated December 27, 1867, addressed to Surveyor General P. W. Hitchcock, the writer made application for a contract to do surveying in this state. He says he had, at that time, been in the business of surveying in Illinois for thirty-four years, and that he believed he was qualified to do such work.

An interesting assertion in this letter is that he had letters of recommendation from Judge Treat, Abraham Lincoln, Jno. T. Stuart, and "many others among the most prominent of our great men."

No copy of the surveyor general's answer is available, but the following extract from Mr. Buck's reply, dated February 11, 1868, gives an intimation of what he may have said, and in the light of what afterwards occurred, seems almost prophetic:

"As to the trouble with the Indians, I expected to encounter all ills. I am no more prepared to be killed than others are, but I think I am just as unlikely to suffer from their depredations as others, and am able to employ such force as will be likely to protect a party of surveyors as others are. In fact that part will not deter me from taking my chance. It is not the profit alone that would induce me to make the attempt, but the desire to be employed where I can see the west, so then so far as the fear of Indians are concerned, that has little or no weigh in this matter.

If I can procure a contract for U. S. surveys I shall go prepared to perform all the requirements of the laws in such cases.

Permit me to speak as though I was personally present. I can procure all the necessary recommendations as a competent surveyor. I can, if I have not now, procure all the necessary outfits and instruments. I can procure all the necessary assistants, and arms for defense as against the Indians and I can perform the work as well as any other man, as my long practice in surveying, I can say without fear of successful contradiction has given me a knowledge of all the various plans that must be carried out and I am anxious to be engage in this business."

Before any contract was executed, there was a change of administration, and the next letter in the series, which is dated May 29, 1869, is addressed to Gen. R. R. Livingston.

In this letter Mr. Buck announces his intention of leaving Illinois for Nebraska within a few days. In the issue of the Nebraska Herald published at Plattsmouth, for June 24, 1869, it is reported, "that Nelson Buck, Esq., of Pontiac, Illinois, a brother of John F. Buck, of this county, has a contract under Surveyor General Livingston for establishing standard lines in the western part of the state."

On July 21st, 1869, Mr. Buck wrote Gen. Livingston from Fort Kearney, as follows: "I regret that I did not procure arms, etc., while there (at Plattsmouth). I made application through Capt. Pollock to Gen. Auger, for leave to draw such as were needed, but did not get them.

"I will write today to Lieut. Mc-Clay for 6 Spencer rifles or needle breech loaders with 200 rounds each. Please write to Lieut. McClay or Gen. Auger, your consent for me to draw such (or others which may be had) at Fort McPherson. Some and indeed several of my company feel discouraged at hearing of Indians, out and through our district of country and want arms so that if we must fight Indians, all can take part in the matter.

"We have lain here three days, hoping for some arms, although I knew the matter was rather doubtful, on account of irregularity in the present application. Still as we were here, we had hoped that the Gen. would issue the necessary orders."

So far as is known, this is the last word from Mr. Buck or from any member of his party except H. B. McGregor and John Nettleton, who left the party after it had gone into the field, ever saw any of its members, either dead or alive, again.

In the issue of The Nebraska Herald for October 14, 1869, it was reported that none of the lines or corners that were to have been established by Mr. Buck under his contract could be found.

This fact, coupled with the fact, that although his trail had been discovered, and an empty water keg found near one of his camps, no trace of the party had been seen, and that Gen. Duncan, who was out on a scouting expedition had found two surveyor's tripods in an Indian camp that had then been recently raided by him, led to the surmise that the members of the party had been massacred.

Lieut. Jacob Almy reported the capture on September 26th, 1869, by a detachment of cavalry under the command of Gen. Duncan, of a squaw who told of an encounter between a party of white men and a band of Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler, that occurred while the Indians were crossing the Republican river between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow creek, to move over to the Beaver.

She said that four young Indians, in advance of the main body of the savages, were attacked by the whites, and that three of the Indians and one white man were killed.

The Indians pursued the aggressors in the direction of the Beaver, took their horses and rations, destroyed two wagons, and killed five of the whites, the rest of them escaping.

The story told by the squaw is corroborated by the account of an investigation made by an employee of the government who was in charge of the agency to which the Sioux returned after their summer's campaign through the Republican valley. His report, dated Whetstone Agency, New Fort Randall, D. T., Jan. 8, 1870, reads in part, as follows: "As intimated in my last letter to you in reference to the killing or a party of surveyors under charge of Mr. Buck, last summer, by Indians, I have now to state that I have made diligent inquiry among the Indians located here, including 'Spotted Tail,' `Swift Bear,' 'Pawnee Killer,' and others and send you the substance of information gained up to the present time.

'Pawnee Killer' arrived at this agency in September last. His party all had more or less United States currency, which they paid over very freely while here. 'Spotted Tail' informs me that one of his party related to him that they attacked near Beaver creek, a party of about twelve surveyors in August last, and succeeded in killing six of the party. The balance retreated and entrenched themselves. The Indians subsequently attacked and were repulsed with a loss of three Indians killed, they (the Indians) abandoned the attack. He did not learn fate of this latter party, but he states they may have been afterwards killed by a different party of Indians.

Pawnee Killer states substantially same.

'Thigh,' an agreeable soldier (whom I found quite reliable in other matters) gives an account, as related to him by a member of 'Pawnee Killer's' band, of eight white men being killed on Beaver Creek and that three white men were seen escaping at the time of the attack. He has no knowledge of what subsequent became of the latter party. The party had one wagon, which was run into Beaver creek. 'Thigh' says the bodies of the eight white men killed, can now be found near Beaver creek; also that there was a boy, or quite a young man, with this party killed.

Substantially the same story is related by other Indians here. "The route of the band indicated by the Indians, where bodies of white men may be found, is given as follows by my interpreter, viz: Starting from North Platte City and traveling south, striking the mouth of Blackwood creek—a small stream emptying into the Republican, two miles below Frenchman's creek—cross the Republican three miles below the mouth of Blackwood creek; travel south to Beaver creek. The bodies can be found 'near where the military road crosses said creek."

A correspondent of the Omaha Herald, writing from Whetstone agency, under date of January 17, 1870, says: "Since my letter of last week I have had a talk with 'Pawnee Killer' and gained the following facts concerning the massacre of a surveying party near the Republican river, some time ago.

"The village of 'Pawnee Killer' and Whetstone was crossing the ridge (immediately south of the mouth of Red Willow Creek) intending to camp on Beaver creek ten miles distant, when they discovered a party of six white men with a team or teams. A charge was at once made in which three Indians were killed. The whites gained the timber on Beaver creek, where they determined to make a stand, and the Indians, in the meantime, had increased their force to two hundred warriors. Frequent and desperate charges were made on the party during the entire afternoon, and about sundown the last of the six was killed and scalped."

'Pawnee Killer' led the fight in person. He claims that the whites were very brave and many of his warriors were wounded. The three Indians killed were buried in trees on the south side of the Republican, just above the mouth of Red Willow creek.

"There is also a report among the Indians that there were twelve whites in the party, and that six of them escaped. This is hardly credible. The savages are exultant over the capture of a large amount of ammunition in this fight."

While these accounts differ somewhat in their details, there can be little doubt that they are of the same affair, and that they tell of a massacre of white men in what is now Red Willow county. As the Buck party was the only one in this immediate territory at that time, and as they disappeared it is not unreasonable to believe they were the victims of the tragedy here recorded.

Search was instituted in the fall of 1869 for some trace of the bodies, but without success.

The Nebraska Herald for October 21st of that year mentions the fact of the arrival in Plattsmouth of Willard P. Buck, a son of Nelson Buck, and of his intention to secure an escort to go in search of some trail of the party.

The issue of November 11, 1869, contains the following account of the result of the quest:

"Mr. Willard P. Buck, son of the missing surveyor, arrived in the city yesterday from a trip to the west in search of his father and comrades. He found two or three wagons on Beaver creek, a branch of the Republican river. One of them had been cut to pieces and portions of it thrown into the stream. He also found some scraps of paper with writing on which belonged to his father—one being a part of a bill of goods from Clark & Plummer in this city. He also found two tripods belonging to the party, which he recognized immediately. The place where these things were found gave evidence of being either a camp or where the party had made a stand against the Indians. No trace of the bodies was found, and everything goes to show that the party was attacked away from their wagons or else they were all taken prisoners. The latter theory is hardly reasonable, as Indians seldom make prisoners of men.

We think the discoveries made by Mr. Buck are calculated to do away with the last reasonable hope that any of the party are yet alive.

A curious sequel to this grim tale is found in the following letter dated Ft. McPherson, Neb., Nov. 8, 1869, from Col. Emery to Gen. Geo. D. Ruggles, his superior officer:

"I telegraphed you yesterday that `H' company, under Lieut. Haskins, sent to escort Mr. Chaffe, had got back and saw no signs of Indians in the country south of the Platte. but there was found a fresh Indian tomb in a tree on the Republican, between the mouths of Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow, three bodies of Buck Indians, and one had on it the enclosed paper, which appears to be a letter dated 'Morris, I., May, 1869,' signed 'Your Sister, Carrie Warner.' Warner, I understand, is the name of one of Mr. Buck's surveying party, supposed to have been massacred by the Indians. This leaves little doubt of the fate of Mr. Warren, and it may be some consolation to his sister to forward this relic which is herewith enclosed, and know that the savage who killed her brother was himself killed, for the bodies all bore the marks of bullets; two were shot in the breast and one in the side.

"As is no doubt known to you, suspension, in a tree is the Sioux mode of sepulture."

Col. Emery is mistaken when he says Warren was the name of one member of the Buck party, as no one of that name is mentioned in any list of the killed, but the finding of the bodies of the three

Indians is corroboration of the other accounts of the number of savages who were killed.

In the report of the Surveyor General of Nebraska, dated August 31, 1871, to the secretary of the interior is found the following: "The work of 1869 though so nearly completed and so rigidly held within the limits and the restrictions of the United States laws, the surveying manual and supplement, and carefully drawn special instructions, has not been without disaster and loss of life of some who were tempted by the liberal compensation allowed by the government to risk their all upon the beautiful plains of Nebraska; and for poor Nelson Buck, who had left behind in Illinois his genial family and peaceful fireside, there was no 'primrose path of dalliance and ease,' but a merciless death from an insidious foe; and such cases cause regret that the military arm is not long enough to prevent their recurrence.

Mr. Buck and his party, viz: J. L. Logan, J. C. Haldeman, F. C. McFarland, J. R. Nettleton, W. McCulloch, J. V. Brown, Linden L. Crocker, Stanley Meecham, H. L. Levi and James Wolteman, were all killed by the Indians, while on the Beaver, a tributary of the Republican, near his district of survey, embraced in his contract, No. 92..."
Of the men named above, J. R. Nettleton is known to have left the party before the massacre, in company with H. B. McGregor, and was not, of course, killed, but nothing has been heard or seen of the others from the day of their disappearance up until now.

No notice of the murder of these men was taken by the government other than by the introduction, in the United States senate, by Senator Thayer, of a resolution calling for an official investigation, but the matter seems to have ended there, and, so far as can be ascertained, the culprits were not made to suffer for their crimes.

1911 Historical List of Ten Significant Conflicts with Native Americans in Nebraska

On July 7, 1911, the McCook Republican newspaper published an article listing ten significant past conflicts with Native Americans. This list included the Nelson Buck surveying party. It is interesting to note that many of these conflicts occurred in the month of August. A copy of the article is shown below.

The McCook Republican
July 7, 1911

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Brief Outline of Principal Events in Early Days of Nebraska

AUTHENTIC INDIAN FIGHTS

From as Early as 1843

A Singular Fact is a Majority of Them Occurring in the Month of August

1834, June. During the latter-part of this mouth John C. Freemont traversed the extreme south-western corner of the state, crossing the Kansas-Nebraska line, and traveling in a northwesterly direction over what are now Dundy and Chase counties.

1860, August 6. Captain Sturgis, in command of several companies of United States troops, had an encounter with the Kiowas and Comanches somewhere between Beaver Creek and the Republican river, in which twenty-nine Indians were killed, and six whites and friendly Indians were either killed or seriously wounded.

1868, August 7. A battalion of pioneer scouts, who were, at the time, hunting buffalo at some place on the Republican River, which cannot at this time be determined, was attacked by a large force of Cheyenne and Sioux Indians. In the fight that ensued, the whites lost two men killed and several wounded. The losses of the Indians are unknown.

1868, September. Sometime about the middle of September, 1868, a flagman with a surveying party which was at work in the Republican valley, was killed by the Indians.

1868, September 17. On this day the battle of Beecher Island was begun. While this occurred about twenty miles south of Wray, in Colorado, happened so near in our territory that it is really a part of our history. Fifty-two scouts and frontiersmen under the command of Lieutenant Forsythe were besieged for eight days by several hundred Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Ogallala Sioux under the leadership of Roman Nose. The Island on which the whites made their stand was named for Lieutenant Beecher, a nephew of Henry Ward Beecher, who was killed in the fight. This little band of whites was finally, on the ninth day, rescued from their position by a detachment of United States troops.

1869, July 11. General Carr had a battle with the Sioux on the head-waters of the Republican, in which fifty-two Indians were killed, and 350 ponies were captured.

1869, July or August. Sometime in the summer of 1869, probably the latter part of July or the early part of August, a surveying party consisting of from ten to twelve men (the exact number is not definitely known, though there were probably ten), under the direction of Nelson Buck, disappeared on the plains of southwestern Nebraska. While search was instituted within a short time after it was known that some misfortune had over-come the party, no trace of even the bodies of the victims was found, although some evidence was discovered of where their last camp had been.

1869, August 21. William K Daugherty, who was in charge of a party of surveyors, had an all-day's battle with a band of Sioux some-where in this part of the state, though it is not known just where this conflict took place. Three of the Indians were killed, and at least nine others were wounded. Of the whites, Daugherty's brother was blinded by the explosion of a cartridge, and another of the party slightly wounded. The whites protected themselves by throwing up embankments of sand, and escaped in the night, after everything they had was stolen by the Indians.

1883, August 5. The Pawnees, who had been in southwestern Nebraska on a buffalo hunt, were attacked by the Ogallala and Brule Sioux, and twenty men, thirty-nine women and ten children, being sixty-nine in all, were killed, while eleven others were wounded and the same number carried into captivity The Pawnees numbered about 250 men, 100 women and 50 children, and the Sioux about 600. The Pawnees lost the meat and skins of 800 buffalo they had killed, and in addition they lost 100 horses and ,

most of their supplies and arms. This event occurred in what is known as massacre canyon, a long, deep ravine running in a northwesterly direction through the central part of Hitchcock county, part of the Indians being encamped in that part of the canyon which lies directly north of where the town of Trenton now stands.

1874, This was the year of the grasshopper scourge in Nebraska. Only those who lived through the experience, probably can comprehend the situation. Sometime in the summer the plains were visited by swarms of grasshoppers, and after their passage not a vestige of the crop that had been planted was left. The settlers were destitute, and of the thousands of people who then inhabited this part of the state, nearly all were objects of charity.

1878, October. On September 9, 1878, a band of northern Cheyennes, who, in the summer of 1877, had been removed from their haunts in the Black Hills, to a reservation in Indian Territory, started from their agency to return to their northern range. They crossed the Kansas-Nebraska line about the first day of October, and traveled north, slaughtering cattle and stealing horses. They are known to have killed thirty-two people in Decatur and Rawlins counties, Kansas, but, so far as is known, the only person that lost his life in this part of Nebraska was George Rowley, who lived a that time near Wauneta Falls, but who was killed north of Wauneta several miles, while on his way from Greeley, Colorado to his home.

The foregoing is a brief outline of the principal events of general interest that have occurred in this part of Nebraska so far as they have been discovered. Doubtless there are many others which subsequent research will disclose, while as to those that have been mentioned, further investigation will reveal much that is now not known.

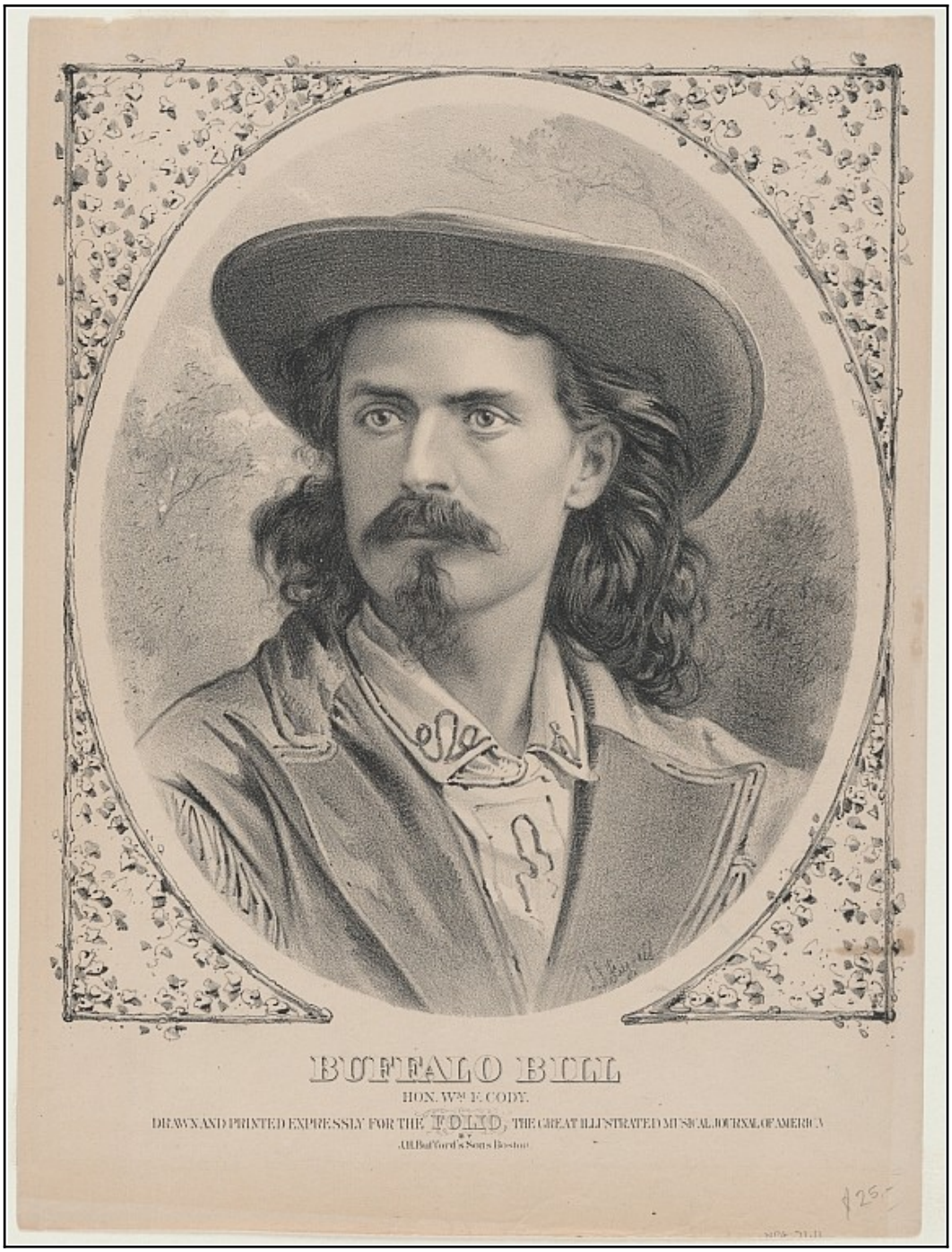
CHAPTER 10

1917 to 1925

Buffalo Bill Died in 1917

Wikipedia has a short biography for Buffalo Bill Cody. A copy of this bio is shown below.

> William Frederick Cody (February 26, 1846 to January 10, 1917), known as Buffalo Bill, was an American soldier, bison hunter, and showman.
>
> One of the most famous and well-known figures of the American Old West, Cody started his legend when he was only 23. Shortly thereafter he started performing in shows that displayed cowboy themes and episodes from the frontier and Indian Wars. He founded Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1883, taking his large company on tours in the United States and, beginning in 1887, in Europe.
>
> He was born in Le Claire, Iowa Territory (now the U.S. state of Iowa), but he lived for several years in his father's hometown in modern-day Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, before the family returned to the Midwest and settled in the Kansas Territory.
>
> Buffalo Bill started working at the age of 11, after his father's death, and became a rider for the Pony Express at age 15. During the American Civil War, he served the Union from 1863 to the end of the war in 1865.
>
> Later he served as a civilian scout for the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars.
>
> While he was initially awarded the Medal of Honor in 1872 for his actions in the Indian Wars, he was among 910 recipients to have the award rescinded in 1917. Congress reinstated the medals for Cody and four other civilian scouts in 1989.



BUFFALO BILL

HON. Wm F. CODY.

DRAWN AND PRINTED EXPRESSLY FOR THE FOLIO, THE GREAT ILLUSTRATED MUSICAL JOURNAL OF AMERICA

A.H. Bad'Gord & Sons Boston

Mr. Berger to Investigate the Nelson Buck Massacre in 1917

A Mr. Berger of Elmwood, Nebraska, announced he was going to investigate the Nelson Buck massacre. The article stating this is shown below.

> The Louisville Weekly Courier
> July 13, 1917
>
> George L. Berger, of Elmwood, and a former citizen of Louisville precinct, was in town Monday night visiting with his old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ahl. Mr. Berger was on his way to the county seat in the interest of the State Historical Society to try and gather further evidence of the massacre of the Nelson Buck surveying party in Red Willow county in 1869 by Indians. If any pioneer citizen has knowledge of this massacre that might be of assistance to Mr. Berger in writing this report they will confer a favor by communicating such information to Mr. Berger of Elmwood.

Mr. Berger Continues to Investigate the Nelson Buck Massacre in 1917

Another newspaper published the article below stating that Mr. Berger was continuing his investigation.

> The Elmwood Leader
> July 27, 1917
>
> G. L. Berger is very industrious in his research relative to procuring information concerning the Nelson Buck Indian Massacre in Red Willow county. He is gaining information right along, but wants more and will appreciate any information that anyone can give him in regard to this matter.

Additional newspaper searches were conducted to see if Mr. Berger ever published the findings of his research. No articles were found to indicate he ever published his research results.

1917 Nebraska Historical Society Book

In 1917, the Nebraska State Historical Society published a book which contained past years proceedings and reports.

In 1909, a Mr. Harvey was chairman of the committee on marking historic sites. He presented a report on his committee's progress on erecting a marker for the Nelson Buck massacre. A copy of his report is shown below.

> Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society
> Volume XVIII
> Edited by Albert Watkins - Historian of the Society
> Lincoln, Nebraska
> The Nebraska State Historical Society
> 1917
>
> **REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON MARKING HISTORIC SITES.**
> **LINCOLN, NEBR.**
> January 12, 1909.
>
> To the officers and members of the Nebraska State Historical Society: As chairman of the committee on the marking of historic sites I have to report that no monuments have been erected, as yet, but that considerable preliminary work has been done in the may of examining such sites as seem worthy of that distinction.
>
> The execution of the plan of the general government in subdividing the territory by surveys in small parcels covered a period of thirty-two years beginning in 1854 and ending in 1886, and contracts were made with persona of supposed competency to discharge these difficult and often hazardous undertakings.
>
> Much of the work of the deputy surveyors was done in a hostile Indian country in advance of white settlement. The surveyors were therefore continually exposed to danger and were obliged to be always on the alert to avoid surprise and be prepared at all times for attack. It is remarkable that so many small surveying parties were able to maintain themselves through all the years of Indian hostilities with the loss of only about a dozen men, of a few homes and mules and perhaps $5,000 worth of camp equipage, provisions and arms.
>
> On December 27, 1867, Nelson Buck, a surveyor of thirty-four years experience in Illinois, made application to the surveyor-general of Nebraska for a contract, and in answer to a communication from the surveyor-general said that he was no more prepared to be killed by Indians

than others, but thought it unlikely that he would suffer from their depredations as he intended to employ sufficient force to protect the party.

Mr. Buck was awarded contract number 22, dated July 5, 1869, by Robert R. Livingston, surveyor-general of Nebraska, for the survey of the following lines, to wit :

Fourth guide meridian west from the base line north to the first and second standard parallels, 48 miles.

First standard parallel north from the third to the fourth guide meridian, 48 miles.

Exterior lines of townships 5 to 8 inclusive, of ranges 25 to 32 west, 312 miles, a total of 408 miles.

The three-hundredth milestone on the base line west of the Missouri River, in Hitchcock county, is the initial point of the line first mentioned, and it runs between ranges 32 and 33. The first parallel above mentioned is between Hayes and Hitchcock, and Frontier and Red Willow counties.

On July 21 the contractor writes to the surveyor-general from Ft. McPherson expressing regret that he did not procure arms at Plattsmouth and that he had made application to General Augur, commanding the department of the Platte, for six Spencer rifles, or "needle breech loaders," with 200 rounds of ammunition for each gun. He said that several members of his company were discouraged at reports about hostile Indians in his territory, and they wanted arms so that all could defend if they should be attacked. This is the last communication from Mr. Buck to the surveyor-general on file with the surveying records in the office of the commissioner of public lands and buildings.

On October 2, 1869, Deputy W. E. Daugherty reported to the surveyor-general that having been unable to find Buck's lines he had instituted a search which resulted in the discovery of an old camp, a load of peeled stakes, evidently cut when the bark would peel freely ; that he had traced Buck's wagon track about three miles to a place where he had camped on a creek two nights; and had found an abandoned water keg.

This information was communicated to military headquarters, and a reconnoitering party, under command of Lieut. Jacob Almy, Fifth cavalry, spent some time in scouting on the Republican River and tributaries.

Lieutenant Almy reported to his commanding officer that about August 20, when cherries were ripe, the Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler were moving from the Republican valley to Beaver Creek, crossing

between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow; that four young Indians were in advance and one of them returned and reported that the other three were killed by white men who were not soldiers; and that one white man had been killed. The squaws and children went into the brush and the men went towards the Beaver to fight. Returning at dark they reported that they had killed five more white men and destroyed two wagons.

In August, 1869, I (Mr. Harvey) was employed in Mr. Allason's surveying party, and on the twenty-second, as we were traveling on the old Ben Holladay stage line from Fort McPherson to O'Fallon's Bluff, we were overtaken by a herd of cattle.

Among the herders was a young man who, on learning who we were, informed us that he had recently quit Buck's party because it was so poorly armed; that it had been on the Red Willow looking for the monuments on the second parallel which we had established two months before, but had returned to McPherson for more arms.

In 1871, I was employed by the land department of the Union Pacific Railroad Company to examine its lands in the Platte valley, preparatory to their being placed on the market, and while at McPherson got acquainted with a young man who was the keeper of the tollgate on John Burke's bridge over the north channel of the Platte river. In May of the following year, being still in the some employ, while examining land near Gibbon, Buffalo county, one afternoon, I took shelter from a rain storm in the shack of a young homesteader and remained there over night. I recognized in my host the keeper of the toll-gate.

He said that he belonged to the Fifth cavalry in 1869; was with the reconnoitering expedition which found the trail of Buck's party, and had traced it from the Republican to Beaver Creek ; and that on crossing the table-land he discovered evidences of a running fight and the flight of the party, shown by the running of the teams over smooth ground and downhill.

One wagon was found backed into Beaver Creek among some box-elder and willow bushes. My informant also said that his party found a number of dead Indians buried in tree-tops, but my recollection is that he said that no bodies of white men were found.

[The young herder referred to by Mr. Harvey was H. B. McGregor. Mr. John F. Cordeal of McCook, Nebraska, discovered Mr. McGregor's post office address and procured from a statement of facts. It follows this narrative, page 106.]

W. E. Daugherty completed the survey of the important lines of Buck's contract; and in a footnote of his field notes he says that the Buck surveying party was massacred on the southwest quarter section 31, township 1, range 28, west. In 1872 this township was subdivided into sections by George W. Fairfield, and at the southwest corner of section 31 of his map is found this statement: "Nelson Buck and party murdered here by Indians."

In May of 1908, as state surveyor, I went to Danbury to make an examination of the line between sections 30 and 31, township 1 north, range 28 west which was in dispute between the adjacent landowners, and learned that it was at least a matter of local notoriety that the Nelson Buck surveying party was massacred in a bend of Beaver Creek in section 31, about half a mile south of the disputed line.

After considerable inquiry I found an old man, Mr. John Conners, who settled on the Beaver near this place in 1873 or 1874, and he informed me that he found a number of bones in a bend of the creek and the running gear of a wagon in the creek behind some box-elder bushes, as though it had been run backwards into the stream, and that in after years a bone picker came along and gathered up the bones, some of which he was satisfied were those of animals and carried them away.

From the quarter section between section 31 and 36, township 1 north, ranges 28 and 29, the stake shown at extreme left of picture bears s. 56 degrees 40 minutes e. 24 chains distant.

A woman living on the next section, who he said was quite well educated and understood the anatomy of the human body, examined the bones and said that some of them were human. Mr. Conners pointed out to me the place where the bones lay and the box-elder bush behind which the wagon had been found in the creek. I drove a stake at the point indicated by him as the position of the bones and afterward determined its location in the section from the quarter section corner between sections 31 and 36. The bearing of the stake is s. 50 degrees 40 minutes e. 24 chains distant.

A young man where I boarded took two views of the location with a Kodak which show the stake, before mentioned, and myself standing in front of the box-elder bush. One of these views and a sketch of the creek with the bearing and distance from the quarter corner is herewith filed and made a part of this report.

It will be noted that in the story, as above narrated, there is a continuity of the facts gathered from the different sources which could not well have been the result of collusion. It will also be noted that there is a disagreement in the opinion of the woman that some of the bones were

human, and the statement of the young soldier, as I recollect, that his party did not find the bodies of any white men. This is emphasized somewhat by the statement of Mr. Conners that he never saw any human skulls among the bones.

From the report of the surveyor-general I copy the names of the men engaged by Mr. Buck and who are supposed to have been killed:

Nelson Buck
J. L. Logan
J. C. Haldeman
H. L. Levi
F. C. McFarland
J. V. Brown
J. R. Nettleton
Linden L. Crocker
W. McCulloch
Stanley Meecham
Jas. Wolteman

I call attention to this event as being the one great tragedy that befell an entire party engaged in the survey of the public domain in Nebraska and as being of sufficient importance and interest to be perpetuated by a suitable monument.

H. B. McGREGOR LETTER.
PONTIAC, ILLs., Jan. 4th, 1912.

CORDEAL: MY DEAR Sir Re—to your last letter accept my apology for not replying sooner. partly because I have had little time and partly because I could not locate some memorandum I made years ago that might refresh my memory as to names, etc. I will have to depend upon my recollections and they are not so vivid after a lifetime of vicissitudes as they once were.

1st as to inquiry as to Nelson Buck's daughter the lady is still living here. A letter to "Mrs. Cordelia Watson" will reach her (she having married a Charles Watson) however she [has] no information to give except what she has been told, her Mother having destroyed all letters & memorandum relating to this expedition before her death about three years ago.

One day in June 1869 (The Rainy Year) we left Pontiac in charge of Nelson Buck a surveyor of about 60 years of age—leaving with him—were 5 young men none 20 years of age, myself being the youngest member employed to assist him in government survey somewhere in this Oregon territory known to us as Nebraska.

H. B. McGregor
John Nettleton
McFarland
McCullough
James Sager or Segar

None of us were properly equipped for such an enterprise it being understood we were to be armed by the U. S. at some point and also to have a soldier escort on our work.

Each took what he had. Mr. Buck had a fine rifle—but muzzle loading one had a rusty shot gun another an old army revolver, myself I had an army Springfield Carbine—but with only ten cartridges for it.

Harm

It was all a dream with us and we thought little of any danger. Our itinerary was by C&A to Chicago and from there by rail to Council Bluffs Iowa. A tramp down the east side of the river until opposite Plattsmouth Nebraska then we were ferried across by a rope ferry to the Nebraska side and went into camp to complete preparations. On this walk down the river we saw our first Indians camped along the river.

I was told they were Omahas & Pottawatomies & not—ugly. I had no communication with them and they paid apparently no attention to us. I do not recall just how many days we were at Plattsmouth but a week or two. I recall I was there on July 4th 1869 & saw the party of notables drive the first spike in the R. R. then being run out there on that date—(Now the Burlington I believe) six more men were recruited while there four being about our ages, one about I should say twenty five (a scout) & one possibly 50 a teamster of them all I can only recall the name of the teamster Levi Minoslouski probably a Polish Jew with dark short curls and green eyes I never saw such before or since.

We had but one wagon and team—It rained almost continuously & it was all the team could do to pull wagon and out-fit so we all tramped; So far we had seen no Indians in Nebraska except a few Pawnees supposedly friendly.

Jogging along ahead of the balance of our outfit McCulloch and I came upon a group of "dobe" Hovels one day (or sod Houses) and we learned we were at what was then known as "Grand Island Nebraska" south of the Platte (Old Gov. trail)

Stopping at the nearest house I asked a motherly looking lady to sell us a glass of milk. We were invited in and given milk for which no pay would be accepted. Noticing a lot of Indian bead work moccasin [s], arrows, clubs etc., I asked for their history instantly this kindly lady became transformed into a raging tigress.

Injuns, she screamed "I poisoned 'em seven of 'em & I wish I could the whole of 'em" they killed scalped and burnt my boy and I will kill 'em anyway I can. I put arsenic in my sugar for them and went away and left it for them thieving Pawnees to steal. I got seven of them and their outfits. ["]

I began then to realize what Indian warfare meant for the first time no mercy by white or Red—but death by any means available on both sides.

From Grand Island to Lincoln nothing of importance except continual rains and steady walking for us all, at Lincoln they were at work on the foundation of the state capital & I found a Mr. Cropsey of Fairbury, Ill. there selling city lots the best $300, $25 down balance on long time & he told me homesteads could be had about 3 miles from Lincoln.

From Lincoln to Fort Kearny nothing of interest one continual plod through rain and mud. Graves became more frequent however as we went west and a little board at the head of many simply said "killed by Indians" occasionally an arrow rudely cut in the board. I never saw a name on any of them but one and that had the single word "Comanches" roughly lettered on it.

Rattlesnakes and Prairie dogs & some game became more numerous as we neared Fort Kearny also Grasshoppers by the millions big and little.

It did not look to me like much of a country, sand, and sand hills—though the flat lands are fairly well grassed through which the trail ran.

We arrived safely at Fort Kearny and were kindly treated by the C. 0. Major Pollock his officers and men. We camped and waited here some time officers and privates repeatedly warning us we would be killed if we ventured far poorly armed or without an escort. I know Mr. Buck made every effort to get arms and an escort but without avail from day to day and finally in despair he set out anyway supplies and money both getting low.

Ten days about after leaving the fort Mr. Buck told me to go back to the fort with John Nettleton & wait for the escort & arms & pilot them to the locality they were in as he was about in his territory and would begin running lines.

We got into the fort all right and told our errand but there was nothing there. Nettleton hired out to the Platte Ferryman that day and I never saw him again though I learned afterward he got safely back to Illinois.

I remained at the Fort for a time rations and a bunk being given to me Maj Pollock finally told me the Post trader wanted some one to drive an ox team to Plum Creek coming after wood—I took this job and drove the ox team back and forth making two trips each week for three weeks often at night hearing Indians crossing the Platte while lying in the grass but never seeing one. One man was with me all the time with another team of oxen I cannot recall his name but he was a prince of a man after my third round trip one of the Evans Bros of St Louis came along with a sutler outfit and I hired to him as a rider with his cattle outfit a large one if I recall correctly about 2600 head of cattle & about 60 people in all herder scouts some of the scouts bore famous names Texas Jack—a lean sinewy taciturn man in Buckskins Wild Bill was another—Evans himself was a splendid specimen of manhood blonde bearded and erect on foot or in saddle—a big man in every sense of the word I should say 35 or 40 years old. While with the Evans outfit your Mr. Harvey met me one day and I told him as much of my story as I thought he cared to hear—

I don't suppose my subsequent adventures interest you, they are many and varied.

Truly

H. B. McGregor

I met Mrs. Watson, Nelson Buck's last living child yesterday. She had nothing new to say or show. March 17, 1913

This report also had one photograph. A copy of this photograph is shown below.

SUPPOSED SITE OF THE BUCK TRAGEDY.

CHAPTER 11

1926 to 1933

1926 Nebraska Historical Society Article

The article below was written by the Nebraska Historical Society in 1926.

> The Wilsonville Review
> January 22, 1926
>
> **The Disappearance of Buck Surveying Party**
>
> **Nebraska Historical Society**
>
> The disappearance of the Buck surveying party in the summer of 1869 is one of the mysteries of the plains. The party consisting of twelve men under the leadership of Nelson Buck, started from Fort Kearney for the Republican country in the latter part of July. Application had been made to the military authorities for arms, but for some reason they were not furnished. After the party had proceeded for some distance Mr. Buck directed two of its members to return to Fort Kearney and there await fulfillment of his requisitions. The others proceeded on their way and so far as is known nothing was seen or heard of them again.
>
> Later in the season when the continued absence of the men had been noted, it was discovered that none of the lines or corners that were to have been established by Mr. Buck could be found. This fact coupled with the fact that although his trail had been seen and an empty water keg found near one of the camps, no trace of the party had been discovered, and that Gen. Duncan, who was out on a scouting expedition had found two surveyor's tripods in an Indian camp that had been recently raided by him, led to the conviction that the members of the party had been massacred.
>
> Lieut. Almy reported the capture, by a detachment of cavalry on the 26th day of September, 1869, of a squaw who told of an encounter between a party of white men and a band of Indians under Pawnee Killer and The Whistler, which occurred while the Indians were crossing the Republican river between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow creek, to move over to the Beaver.
>
> It seems that four Indians in advance of the main body of the savages were attacked by the whites, and that three of the Indians

and one white man were killed. The Indians pursued the aggressors in the direction of the Beaver, took their horses and rations, destroyed two wagons and killed five of them, the remainder escaping.

The story told by the squaw is corroborated in the account of an inquiry made by an employee of the government who was in charge of the agency to which the Sioux returned after their summer's campaign through the Republican valley.

As the Buck party was the only party of white men in this vicinity at that time and as all of its members disappeared, we are bound to believe, unless we concede that these stories are pure fabrications, that they were the victims of the tragedy recorded.

Search for the bodies was made, but without avail. Recent investigations leave no room for question that the last stand of the whites was made at a place on the banks of Beaver Creek in Red Willow county, but where their bones lie no one knows.

The Pawnee may be called the aboriginal Nebraskan. The Republican Pawnee inhabited the Republican valley. No one who is familiar with the grassy stream-threaded valleys of south-western Nebraska can wonder that they were guarded jealously by the people who asserted possessory rights over them. Other stories of this kind, will be printed as we can get them.

Niece Wants Historical Marker in 1926

In 1926, a niece of Nelson Buck recommended a historical marker be erected in honor of the Buck surveying party. A copy of the article is below.

> The McCook Daily Gazette
> February 5, 1926
>
> **Niece of Nelson Buck Writes for Massacre History**
>
> **E. S. Hill, Indianola Pioneer Interrogated by Woman Who Wishes to Mark Historic Spot**
>
> Mrs. J. D. Cross of Union, Nebr., niece of Nelson Buck, surveyor who was killed in the Pawnee Indian massacre of a surveying party in or near Red Willow county about August 20, 1869, has written a letter to E. S. Hill, oldest continuous inhabitant of Red Willow county, asking for more in formation concerning the massacre, so that a marker may be erected near the site of the killing.
>
> Mrs. Cross saw the article in the Omaha Bee on Mr. Hill's 91st birthday, and noted that he was the oldest living inhabitant in the county, in point of years spent within its boundaries.
>
> Mr. Hill came to Red Willow county three years after the massacre, but remembers well the tales told of it, and has informed Mrs. Cross of all he knows. No definite location of the killing has ever been established, but the location has been established within a reasonable area.
>
> Mr. Hill referred Mrs. Cross to the Nebraska state historical society book, which has a description of the massacre as nearly accurate as could be obtained. In this book it is stated that W. E. Daugherty completed the survey of the important lines of Buck's contract, and in a footnote of his field notes says that the Buck surveying. party was massacred on the southwest quarter section 31, township 1, range 28, west.
>
> Recommendation has been made to the state historical society that the site of the Nelson Buck party massacre be marked as a matter of historical significance in the state, but as yet no marker has been erected.

Local Newspaper Lobbies for Nelson Buck Historical Marker

The February 27, 1926, issue of the McCook Daily Gazette published a list they called the "Daily Gazette Platform." The 5th item on their platform list was for a memorial to commemorate the massacre by Indians of Nelson Buck and his party of surveyors in 1869.

This newspaper published its platform list in many subsequent issues.

Pontiac Man Recounts the Story of the Nelson Buck Massacre in 1926

The author of this story knew some of the Pontiac boys that went on the expedition. The article is shown below.

> The McCook Daily Gazette
> April 27, 1926
>
> **PLAN MONUMENT TO NELSON BUCK**
>
> **Old Friend Southwestern Nebraska Surveyor Gives History**
>
> EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story, from the Pontiac, Ill., Daily Leader, should prove of exceptional interest to everyone interested in the history of this section of Nebraska, and should prove an educational forerunner to the campaign shortly to be launched in earnest by The Daily Gazette, for the Nelson Buck memorial.
>
> Dr. Z. L. Kay, of McCook, Neb., a former citizen of Pontiac, and who spent his early life here, recently sent his brother, of this city, Joseph, a copy of the McCook Daily Gazette, which among other things we noted carried at the head of its editorial column under the caption of the "Daily Gazette Platform" the following paragraph in bold, black-face type: "A Memorial to Commemorate the Massacre by the Indians of Nelson Buck and his party of surveyors in 1869."
>
> If this platform goes through it will form a close connection between McCook and Pontiac, and besides this it will be the first monument ever erected to a Pontiac citizen since the city was placed on the map nearly ninety years ago.

It is a high honor to receive a monument—the highest in the world more especially from people who knew you not, and who only heard of your deeds of daring through posterity.

Mr. Kay handed me the paper, with the request that I write a short sketch for the McCook paper and for the Pontiac Daily Leader, containing the Pontiac end of the story for publication.

Several years ago at the request of Sylvester Cordeal, of McCook, I handed him a full account of the massacre of Nelson Buck and his party to be placed in the archives of the Nebraska State Historical society, but whether the sketch was ever placed there I do not know.

As it might be interesting to the people of Pontiac and also to the people of McCook I will do my best to give the readers of the Gazette and Leader a short description of Nelson Buck and the boys of Pontiac who were massacred by the Indians on the plains of Nebraska nearly sixty years ago.

But One Survivor

Buxton McGregor, who now resides in Champaign, Ill., is the only survivor of the expedition, and could fill the bill far better than I, but it is sincerely to be regretted that the story of the massacre of this brave little band of pioneers of the plains could not have been undertaken when the stories of those who were the chief actors in the affair could be recited from their own lips.

The early pioneers of McCook and Pontiac have mostly passed away. Fifty-seven years ago many could have told the story but those lips are now forever sealed and tradition alone hands to us an account of their brave deeds and the massacre in which they met their death. I remember well when the party left Pontiac. Buxton McGregor lived just across the street from me, while Frank McFarlane lived in the block adjoining on the east. I never met Nettleton, McCullouch or Sager, but I have played in Mr. Buck's timber (now Chautauqua park) when he ran a "sap bush" there.

Mr. Buck arrived in Pontiac in the year 1850, coming from Bloomington, McLean county, Ill. He was a widower with three children. Shortly after his arrival here he married to the widow of August Fellows, who was one of the first settlers of Pontiac, and who at that time was the owner of the town site. Mr. Buck was a man of many interesting peculiarities and was always first and foremost in everything that went for the upbuilding of Pontiac, and

hardly a week passes at the present time that his name does not appear in the real estate transfers concerning the transfer of property in his addition to the city.

He was a surveyor by profession and was elected to that position for several terms. He was one of the first trustees of the village of Pontiac, organized in 1856, and was the leading force that brought about its incorporation. He was a ready writer for the press in early days of Pontiac, and as handed down by the early pioneers his articles were caustic and to the point.

In 1869, while engaged in writing the first history of Livingston county he received an appointment from the United States government to survey six counties in Nebraska—Red Willow, Frontier, Hayes Hitchcock, Dundy and Chase, all in the southern part of the state, along the border of Kansas and Colorado. They were many miles from civilization, as the Union Pacific was only completed to Kearney, Neb., while the point at which they were massacred was where Lebanon now stands. The history was about one-fifth completed when he left for the west. Before leaving for the west Mr. Buck inserted an advertisement in one of the local papers for eight young men to accompany him on the trip, assuring them of plenty of sport, with an excellent chance to see the country. The opportunity afforded by the expedition for exploring the wilds of Nebraska attracted the attention of several of the more adventurous young men of Pontiac, who made application to Mr. Buck for employment, and were enrolled as members of the party.

On the 29th day of June, 1869, Mr. Buck, Frank McFarlane, son of a local tailor, Buxton McGregor, son of the first attorney-at-law of Pontiac, and the only survivor of the party; John Nettleton, son of the first jeweler of Pontiac, and William McCulloch and James Sager, both from farms adjoining Pontiac, started for the west to the field of their labors. None of these young men were over 17 years of age.

They left Pontiac and proceeded to Council Bluffs, Iowa, by rail and from that point proceeded to a point opposite Plattsmouth, Neb., where they crossed the Missouri river. At Plattsmouth, they were joined by six other young men and proceeded without interruption to Fort Kearney, where they were to receive a military escort.

While at Fort Kearney Mr. Buck was cautioned not to proceed further by the commandant, Colonel Pollock, who stated that the country was full of Indians on the warpath, and that they had been

engaged but a few days previous by a troop of cavalry from the fort.

After waiting several days for the escort, and not procuring one, Mr. Buck decided to push forward and accordingly left the fort with his party. After journeying for two days westward and encountering many Indians, Mr. Buck became alarmed and sent young McGregor and Nettleton back to Fort Kearney, with a request to send an escort at once.

The boys returned to the fort and delivered the message, and as no troops were forthcoming, decided to remain until one was provided. No troops being available, the escort was not provided, and McGregor and Nettleton left the fort with their faces turned toward the east and worked their way back to Pontiac, having seen all the Indians they desired.

The surveying party, ten in number, left Fort Kearney about the middle of July, and as nothing had been heard of them for some time an expedition from North Platte, headed by Lieutenant Haskins, U. S. A., with William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) as a scout, left that place the first of October in search for them.

On the 10th of October, Lieutenant Haskins reported to his superior as having found, about 30 miles southeast of McPherson, where Mr. Buck's party was supposed to be, two tripods, a camp and camp equipage and some canned fruit. The camp had the appearance of being deserted. He also saw some wagon tires.

Not long after this a band of Indians were captured, and it was admitted by them that they had had a fight with a party of white men at that point; that it was a desperate one, and the last to fall was a tall man, who was in charge of the party. The Indians denied having burned the bodies of the men, but careful search by expeditions sent out in search of the missing parties, failed to find them, and as not one of them ever returned or has since been heard of, it was generally supposed at the time, that after killing every member of the gallant little band, their bodies were disposed of by the Indians in a manner peculiar to their own.

During my residence in Omaha over forty years ago, I met Buffalo Bill on the streets several times, and it was my intention to stop and engage him in conversation concerning this incident and his part in the affair, but Bill was an actor man at that time and I thought he would turn me down, and besides my heart failed me.

Letters of Surveyor that Followed the Nelson Buck Party Published in 1926

These letters were published in 1926 in the following newspaper article.

The McCook Gazette
December 24, 1926

NEW REVELATIONS ON MASSACRE OF NELSON BUCK SURVEYING PARTY ARE BROUGHT TO LIGHT IN FOUR LETTERS

The following letters from J. F. Cordeal, an officer in the Nebraska State Historical Society, and probably the best posted man in southwest Nebraska on historical affairs of this action, shed some new light on the historical massacre of Nelson Buck and nine members of, his surveying party in 1869. Much has previously been printed about this massacre, no accurate history of which can ever be secured, and these letters,. found by Mr. Cordeal, give some additional important material on the subject.

December 20, 1926.
McCook Daily Gazette, McCook, Nebraska.

Gentlemen: The last time I was in Lincoln, I found letters, of which I enclose copies, in the office of the State Surveyor. Knowing your interest in the massacre of the Buck party, it occurred to me you might desire these.

The massacre of the Buck surveying party is said to have been one of the greatest tragedies of the plains, Mr. Buck himself and the nine men who were with him having been killed. The Buck party left Fort Kearney sometime in July, 1869, and so far as is known, no member of the party was ever seen again.

Remnants of their equipment were afterwards found, but the bodies of the men were not discovered, although immediate search was made for them. The Daugherty letters, of which I enclose copies, throw little more light on the subject than we already had, but are interesting because of their reference. The letter from Fairfield & Wells has no connection with the Buck disaster, but reflects conditions three years later. The point referred to is in the southeastern corner of what is now Dundy county.

Very truly yours,
John F. Cordeal.

Oct. 2nd, 1869.

Gen'l Livingston,

Dear Sir:

I found Buck's lines not run, My only recourse was to run them. I randomed south to the state line, then ran a line meridian north 24 miles, then randomed east on the parallel. Found no signs of Buck until I came to the standard corner east, Found then a lot of stakes evidently cut when the bark would peel freely.

Traced up his wagon track about 3 miles and found where he had camped on a creek evidently two nights on the north side and one on the south side, which was all of the trace of him I found except a water keg at his second camp. I will not remain here long. My escort has left me as their time was up and rations exhausted.

I applied for another. If I do not get it, I will have to leave my contract unfinished, as I cannot finish it without an escort, as the country is full of Indians. We have had to fight our way, through all this trip, even with an escort.

Your friend,
W. E. Daugherty.

North Platte,
Oct. 11th, 1869.

Gen'l Livingston,
Dear Sir:

I received word yesterday that Gen'l Duncan had captured some stock from the Indians, and I went to McPherson today thinking that I might find my mules, but all I got was my tripod legs.

While there, Lieut. Hayes informed me that Lieut. Haskins found, he supposed 30 miles from McPherson S. E. or East of South, two tripods and camp equippage and some canned fruit. This was eight days ago. The camp had the appearance of being deserted. He also saw parts of the wagon. I think it must have been Buck's and I also think from his description of the country and the time he was traveling from there to Platte river that the distance was nearer 50 miles than 30, and that it was on the same creek that I was where he had camped.

I write in haste to inform you of this, thinking that Buck's friends might want to look for him. My party leaves here Thursday morning. If you want to communicate with me, telephone by 8 o'clock Thursday morning. If they want to look for him, either myself or John (my brother) would go with them. I just received a telegram from Omaha stating that my escort would be here on Wednesday.

Respectfully yours,

W. E. Daugherty.

P. S. Please send me about 140 pages of standard Mer. blank books. Also state if you want each parallel and each guide meridian certified by affidavit separate or if they shall be written up from the commencement to the final completion and then signed and certified to as if one book.

W. E. D.

In camp on the Republican, Township 1, N. Range 36, Ws. Sec. 6.

August 14th, 1872.

To E. E.- Cunningham,
Surveyor General,
Plattsmouth, Nebr.

Dear Gen'l:

From present indications, we are afraid we will be unable to complete our work without an escort. The Sioux are encamped about four miles from us and say they are going to stay here and hunt until they hear from Washington and get some pay for this land.

Yesterday, Lieut. Smallwood came up from Red Willow with a small escort, but is going back in the morning. We made application while at Red Willow for an escort, but have heard nothing from it as yet. The Sioux say the Cheyennes are coming up here in about two weeks and if so, we will surely need the escort. We have been troubled and hindered from work two days now by the Indians coming into camp, although they are not hostile at

present. We are getting along very slowly but hope to be back in time to vote for U. S. G.

Do the best you can to have an escort sent to us as soon as possible, one that will remain with us until the work is done.

We received your notice of the approval of our contract.

Charlie Emmet, or "Dashing Charlie," as he is called, says that he thinks they are trying to concentrate at this point and says if the Cheyennes come here be thinks there will be trouble. (This Emmet is the interpreter for the band of Sioux, but we don't know whether he is authorized by the gov't, or not).

Let us hear from you as soon as possible. Lieut. Smallwood says that Gen'l Ord will be at Red Willow in about eight or 10 days and he can perhaps have an escort sent out at once from that point.

Yours respectfully, etc.,

Fairfield & Wells.

Give our regards to the boys and tell them to fix their masticators for some dried meat.

Old Pioneer Settler Recalls the Buck Expedition in 1927

In 1927, a newspaper reporter interviewed a pioneer settler who found artifacts left from the Buck surveying party. A copy of this article is shown below.

The Carroll Index
January 27, 1927

EARLY NEBRASKA SURVEYING PARTY

By A. C. Furman

Through the warp and woof of the history of the early west, strange threads of mystery run—stories of men who went out with high hopes,—men who went out, but who did not come back.

Such a story is that of Nelson Buck and his party, earliest surveyors of southwestern Nebraska.

Nelson Buck and his seven gallant men were massacred by the Indians. They were killed while driving into the virgin prairie the mile posts that meant conquest by the white man—and another tract cut from the Indian's hunting ground. They were wiped from the earth, and the government that sent them out made no investigation of their passing, made no attempt to fix the blame.

Would Erect Monument

Now a group of Red Willow county citizens, interested in history and in preserving the traditions of the early west, have started a movement to erect a monument to the Nelson Buck surveying party. The monument will mark the spot where the sorry remains of their "outfit" were found four years after Nelson Buck and his men were killed.

The monument will be more than a belated gravestone for Nelson Buck, J. L. Logan, J. C. Haldeman, F. C. McFarland, William McCullock, Stanley Meecham, H. L. Levi, and James Walteman, the eight members of the ill-fated party. It will be symbolic of the marking of criss-cross lines across the prairie, dividing it into townships, and sections, and home-sites.

Thus was made a part of the early tradition which is Nebraska's own. Its homesteads lay four-square to all the winds that blew. Its roads were broken with arrow-like direction along section lines, in marked contrast to the meanderings of roads in older eastern

states where surveying followed settling, and distances were first marked in "'ells and "'furlongs".

State-Capitol Tribute

In the beautiful new state capitol building at Lincoln, the people of Nebraska are paying tribute to the covered wagon, whose sheltering canopy made possible the settlement of this state, and to the faithful oxen that drew it. Etched into the stone of its exterior is the buffalo symbol. In its great corridors and assembly rooms, dozens of art motifs recall to the native Nebraskan the sturdy spirit of his pioneer father and grandfather.

Similarly, the people of Red Willow county wish to perpetuate the spirit of the surveyor, who played a quiet, but important part in the conquest of the west,—and against great odds.

Just how great those odds were can still he testified to by Tom Plumb, one of the earliest settlers of Red Willow county. It was the Plumb family who, crossing the prairie in their schooner, happened across the wagon-wrecks that told the story of what happened to the Buck surveying party.

To make that scene more vivid, Plumb went over the ground, carefully and thoroughly, pointing out just where each remain of the expedition was found.

According to the meager historic data on the subject, the Buck massacre occurred in July or August, 1869. The Plumb family went past the spot. to settle a few miles away, in the summer of 1873. Tom Plumb was then a lad old enough to remember the episode distinctly.

Location

He led the way to an open field bordering on a curve of Beaver creek, just a half-mile from the Kansas-Nebraska line, and close to the dividing line of Danbury and Gerver precincts.

The Kansas-Nebraska line, surveyed in 1854, was the logical starting point for Buck's surveying. Evidently, the first few stakes he drove were enough to arouse the deadly animosity of the Sioux Indians.

Mr. Plumb outlined a circle with his heel. "Right here," he said, "Was where we found the camp fire ground. It was burned here

and there was plenty of charcoal still left. You know the buffalo grass would not grow on an old fire place for several years."

"All around here their stakes were scattered. Probably six or eight big native timber stakes about three or four inches square which seemed to be intended for section corners. And there were a lot of smaller stakes, about like picket-pins. which I suppose were to be used for the inside corners. The big stakes had been hewn square, and had letters or figures carved on their sides. They would have been three or four feet above ground after being driven."

"You see that sharp bend in the creek about twenty rods due south of us? Well, a log got lodged at that sharp turn and this whole north and south channel was filled with driftwood."

"About half-way of the driftwood, right in the creek bed, was where we found the wagons. One was a heavy old boy, and the other a light spring wagon."

"Lem Daniels got the most of the wagons out and kept them for several years, but I never knew what disposal he made of 'em. I got a spring seat, minus the springs, and had it for years and years. It had bows over it to make a shade for the driver, but they had been broken off."

"Right over there, (pointing to the southeast) on this bank of the creek, Bill Shockley and I, while out hunting and trapping one day, ran onto a wood-rat's house and in it we found several feet of surveyor's chain and twenty or more rim-fire Spencer cartridges. The brass was covered with verdigris and we thought the powder would be no good, so we tore 'em up and used the bullets to mold balls for our own guns."

"Later 1 found a silver spoon and an old sword-belt in another wood-rat's house, farther down the creek. But perhaps they had been dropped by some hunters. I know the Indians would have hung onto that silver spoon if they had ever laid hands on it?"

Wood Rats Gone

"Are there any wood-rats in this country now?" Mr. Plumb was asked.

"Lord no," he replied. "They've gone with the Indians, the buffalo, the lizards, the buzzards, and the old quarter-pound grasshoppers. You remember those old quarter-pounds don't you?"

He addressed an "old timer" in the party, and got a reminiscent grin.

"They were as long and as big as your first finger, and without a wing on 'em," he recalled. "Green, brown and red-spotted."

Grim Evidence

Mr. Plumb thinks he may possibly have found the bones of one of the members of the party.

Right over east there, just this side of where Perry Plumb's sod house used to stand, in the bottom of the little swale there is where Perry and I found the hip bone, ribs, and finger or toe bones of the man I was telling you about," he said. "We were breaking sod to build a house with when we uncovered 'em, right up near the surface."

"Bradley Duckworth found the skull of a white man, all except the lower jaw, right around here somewhere, and had it on his mantle piece while he lived here on the creek.

"And Lem Daniels' little boys found an old compass, all brass, on the quarter west of this."

I used to work for Lem, and I've looked it over hundreds of times. I think it must have belonged to the Buck party. Lem finally sold it to some junk dealer for the brass there was in it. The boys found it along the creek some little distance north of the Kansas line there. In the big bend just north of that was one of the Indian settlements."

So much for what the world now remembers of the Buck party. The rest of the story comes from records ferreted out, from many different places, by J. F. Cordeal, of McCook, a member of the Nebraska State Historical society.

Buck Knew Dangers

They show that Nelson Buck was fully aware of the dangers of his undertaking when he set out.

From Pontiac, Ill. he wrote to Surveyor General P. W. Hitchcock, of Nebraska, asking for appointment to survey Red Willow, Frontier, Hayes, Hitchcock, Dundy and Chase counties. In that

letter, dated December 27, 1867, he gave Abraham Lincoln as one of his references. Evidently, the surveyor-general wrote back warning him that it would be a hazardous undertaking, for his next letter, dated February 11, 1868, read, in part, as follows:

"As to the trouble with the Indians, I expected to encounter all ills. I am no more prepared to be killed than others are, but I think I am just as unlikely to suffer from their depredations as others, and am able to employ such force as will be likely to protect a party of surveyors as others are. In fact that part will not deter me from taking my chance. It is not the profit alone that would induce me to make the attempt, but the desire to be employed where I can see the west, so then so far as the fear of Indians are concerned, that has little or no weigh in this matter."

Buck went on to outline his ample experience in surveying, which is borne out by records in Pontiac, Ill.

Buck Got Surveying Job

And he got the job, as reported in a news item published in the Nebraska Herald, Plattsmouth, June 24, 1869. The Herald chronicled:

We understand that Nelson Buck, Esq. of Pontiac, Illinois, brother of John F. Buck, of this county, has a contract under Surveyor General Livingston for establishing standard lines in the western part of the state.

John Buck's daughter, Mrs. J. D. Cross, still lives near her father's early home, at Union, Nebr., and furnished the picture of her uncle, taken with his surveying instruments, which appears here, and other helpful data for this story.

The next news of the Buck party, and the last word ever heard from them, came in a letter to General Livingston, written from Fort Kearney on July 21,1869. That letter indicates that the surveying party may have gone into southern Nebraska with insufficient arms. It read:

"I regret that I did not procure arms, etc., while there (at Plattsmouth). I made application through Capt. Pollock to Gen. Auger, for leave to draw such as were needed, but did not get them.

I will write today to Lieut. McClay for 6 Spencer rifles or needle breech loaders with 200 rounds each. Please write to Lieut. McClay or Gen. Auger, your consent for me to draw such (or others which may be had) at Fort McPherson. Some and indeed several of my company feel discouraged at hearing of Indians, out and through our district of country and want arms so that if we must fight Indians, all can take part in the matter.

We have lain here three days, hoping for some arms, although I knew the matter was rather doubtful, on account of irregularity in the present application. Still as we were here, we had hoped that the Gen. would issue the necessary orders."

Nebraska Herald Reports News

On October 14, 1869, the Nebraska Herald reported the Buck party missing, and that no lines or corners that were to have been established by Buck could be found.

The next week's issue tells of the arrival of Willard P. Buck, son of Nelson Buck from Pontiac, Ill., and of his plan to search for his father.

He found enough to satisfy himself that his father had been killed.

Indian Squaw's Story

At one Indian camp where he made inquiry a squaw told him of witnessing the killing of the surveying, party by the warriors of her tribe and assured him that the "white-haired man, (Nelson Buck) was brave and fight like tiger."

"Lieut. Jacob Almy reported the capture on September 26th, 1869, by a detachment of cavalry under the command of Gen. Duncan, of a squaw who told of an encounter between a party of white

men and a band of Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler, that occurred while the Indians were crossing the Republican river between Frenchman's Fork and fled Willow creek, to move over to the Beaver. She said that four young Indians, in advance of the main body of the savages. were attacked by whites, and that three of the Indians and one white man were killed.

The Indians pursued the aggressors in the direction of the Beaver, took their horses and rations, destroyed two wagons, and killed five of the whites, the rest of them escaping.

Government Employes Report

The story told by the squaw is corroborated by the account of an investigation made by an employe of the government who was in charge of the agency to which the Sioux returned after their summer's campaign through the Republican valley. His report, dated Whetstone Agency, New Fort Randall D. T., January 8, 1870, reads in part as follows:

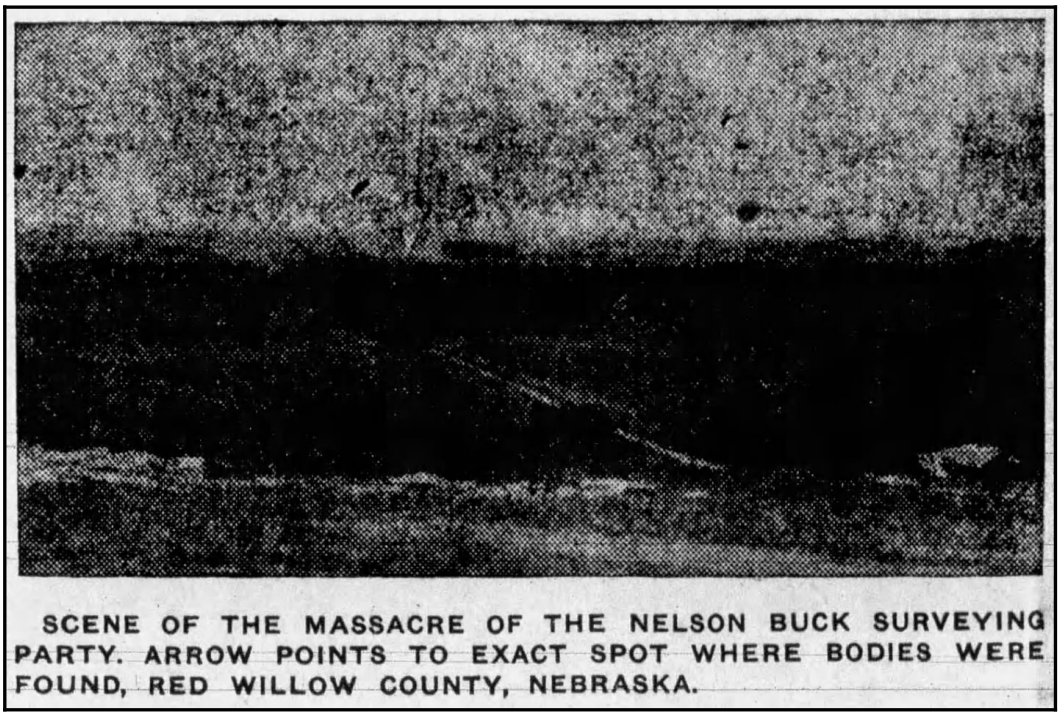
"As intimated. in my last letter to you in reference to the killing of a party of surveyors under charge of Mr. Buck, last summer, by Indians, I have now to state that I have made diligent inquiry among the Indians located here, including 'Spotted Tail,' Swift Bear,' Pawnee Killer,' and others and send you the substance of information gained up to the present time.

'Pawnee Killer' arrived at this agency in September last. His party all had more or less United States currency, which they paid over very freely while here. 'Spotted Tail' informs me that one of his party related to him that they attacked near Beaver creek, a party of about twelve surveyors in August last, and succeeded in killing six of the party. The balance retreated and entrenched themselves. The Indians subsequently attacked and were repulsed with a loss of three Indians killed, when they (the Indians) abandoned the attack. He did not learn the fate of this latter party, but he states they may have been afterward killed by a different party of Indians.

Pawnee Killer' states substantially the same. 'Thigh', an agreeable soldier (whom I found quite reliable in other matters) gives an account, as related to him by a member of 'Pawnee Killer's' band, of eight white men being killed on Beaver creek and that three white men were seen escaping at the time of the attack. He has no knowledge of what subsequently became of the latter party. The party had one wagon, which was run into Beaver creek. 'Thigh' says the bodies of the eight white men killed can now be found near_ Beaver Creek; also that there was a boy, quite a young man, with this party killed. Substantially the same story is related by other Indians here.

The route of the band indicated by the Indians, where bodies of white men may be found, is given as follows by my interpreter, viz: Starting from North Platte City and traveling south, striking the mouth of Blackwood creek —a small stream emptying into the Republican, two miles below Frenchman's creek—across the Republican, three miles below the mouth of Blackwood creek; travel south to Beaver creek. The bodies can be found near where the military road crosses said creek."

This newspaper article included three images. Copies of these images are shown below.



SCENE OF THE MASSACRE OF THE NELSON BUCK SURVEYING PARTY. ARROW POINTS TO EXACT SPOT WHERE BODIES WERE FOUND, RED WILLOW COUNTY, NEBRASKA.

INDIAN CHIEF

CHAPTER 12

1934 to 1936

Harry McGregor Invited in 1934 to Attend New Nelson Buck Memorial in Nebraska

The March 5, 1959, Daily Leader published a "looking back" section back to March 5, 1934. A copy of the 1934 article is shown below.

> H. B. McGregor of this city, has been invited to attend the dedication of a monument to be erected on the spot where Nelson Buck, pioneer resident and surveyor of this city, and his party of surveyors were attacked and wiped out by Indians in Nebraska in 1869.

1936 Nebraska Newspaper Article with Input from Last Survivor Harry McGregor of Pontiac

In 1936, a Mr. A. M. Brookings of Hastings, Nebraska, researched the Nelson Buck expedition. Mr. Brooking exchanged letters with Harry McGregor in Pontiac, Illinois.

In 1936, Harry McGregor was 85 years of age and was living in Pontiac. Harry's wife, Emma died on August 31, 1936. Since the Henry Buck expedition was in 1869, Harry was recalling events that occurred 67 years earlier. Harry died about 19 months after this article was published.

Early Nebraska Surveyor Shot Indian Sport; Brought Many Deaths

The Nebraska State Journal
Sunday, March 8, 1936
By: Elsie A. Harger

Since some of the water projects have been approved there are certain parts of the state just seething with surveyors and one cannot help but contrast the modern methods with those of early days.

Today, men have no fear of Indians, transportation, or means of crossing rivers and prairies as did the ones engaged in this precarious work long ago.

With modern instruments, offices, cars, and the prairies well populated with civilized people, it is almost impossible for them to conceive of their predecessors.

Mystery Lifted.

It is indeed an unusual but interesting coincidence that the veil of mystery surrounding an earlier surveying party—that of Nelson A. Buck — should be completely lifted for the first time just as men are starting on one of the largest projects ever undertaken in Nebraska involving this type of work.

Through voluminous correspondence, A. M. Brooking of Hastings, has found the only survivor of that fateful party and through him and others interested has been able to gather the authentic details piece by piece until all the facts ever to be known are now recorded.

In 1844 we find Nelson Buck residing in Bloomington, Ill., with his wife and five children, pursuing his trade of surveying. It was in this same year that his wife passed away. On moving to Pontiac he married Mrs. Maria Fellows in 1850 and took charge of her estate which consisted of a farm, hotel, many town lots and undivided real estate.

Nebraska Contract.

In 1869 Buck, while writing a history of Livingston county, received word that he had been awarded the contract to survey Red Willow, Frontier, Hayes, Hitchcock, Dundy, and Chase counties in Nebraska.

He immediately began to assemble an outfit and placed an advertisement in the local paper asking for eight young men to accompany him, finally engaging David and Frank McFarlane, Buxton McGregor, John Nettleton, William McCullough, and John Sager.

None of these boys was over seventeen years of age and in light of what followed we can surmise that at least in the case of two of them, Nettleton and McGregor, Buck made a promise to their parents for their safe return.

The party left Pontiac on June 29, 1869, and proceeded to Council Bluffs by rail. From there they went to a point opposite Plattsmouth where they ferried across the Missouri river to the city.

Here the company of surveyors were augmented by five or six others who were hired by Buck. A tent and team and wagon was also purchased here.

Wet Year.

The year of 1869 was known as a wet year and the roads were muddy and at times almost impassible. The boys had expected to ride but found that their equipment and baggage was about all their team could pull. Buck although 60 years of age, shared the hardships with them and walked also.

Incidentally the survivor recalls passing through Lincoln where a man from Fairbury, Ill. was selling lots adjoining the state house, which was then under construction, for $10 dollars for your choice.

They tramped on through Grand Island, which was then a mere collection of sod houses. Stopping to buy some milk, McGregor met a lady who told him she despised the Indians for they had killed her son and she said she had poisoned seven of them by putting arsenic in sugar and leaving it where they could steal it.

Suicide Trip.

It was a long tiresome trip over muddy roads and the wagon mired down many times before the party finally reached Fort Kearney. Here they had been promised an escort for protection but the order for it had either been miscarried or had become pigeon holed among government red tape.

Buck was in a quandary, he was told that in a country infested with hostile Indians it was suicide to go on but without funds and the, expense of caring for his party he had no ultimatum. It was a situation to daunt the stoutest of hearts.

After about a week they decided to go on hoping that an escort of cavalry would follow. They traveled for two days finally reaching the Republican river near the present west edge of Harlan county.

Sager and one of the McFarlane boys had openly boasted that they were going to shoot the first Indians they saw, and it was not long until they had the chance.

Shoot An Indian.

The evening of their arrival at the Republican river these two boys went some distance from the camp where they met or overtook two Indians. One of these was promptly shot down by Sager but the other gun missed fire and the second Indian escaped. The bow, arrows, and other personal equipment was stripped from the corpse and taken into camp where they were exhibited.

Buck was greatly disturbed by this happening for he was smart enough to know that this fool-hardy act might precipitate a world of trouble so he decided to send Nettleton and McGregor back to the fort to make a last plea for an escort or additional arms.

The return trip took them thirty-six hours of hard traveling and luckily they saw no Indians. The boys delivered their message but as no troops were forthcoming they were at a loss to know what to do.

McGregor had $3 in his pocket, Nettleton had nothing. Was it policy to return to Buck? At least something had to be done so Nettleton obtained a job as a helper to the ferry man. At least that is what he told McGregor and borrowed the $3 dollars on the strength of it, promising to meet him at the Platte crossing the next morning. He was never seen again, His fate is a mystery to this day although his brother spent thousands of dollars trying to obtain a trace of him and even enlisted the Masonic fraternity in the search.

McGregor got a job from Major Pollack at the fort and not hearing anything from his party after several weeks he finally worked his way back to Omaha and then proceeded to Pontiac.

What of Buck.

In the meantime what has happened to Buck and his party? No word was ever received from him after the two boys left. But we do know he proceeded to the place where they were to begin their work and pitched camp about a half a mile north of the Kansas-Nebraska line, close to the dividing line between Danbury and Gerver township on a curve of the Beaver Creek in Red Willow county.

This location has been known for years for Tom Plum, who settled nearby in 1873, told that when his folks came there the location of the camp was still plain to see. The grass was burned about the places where the campfires were made and survey stakes were scattered all around. Two wagons were in the creek bed lodged in the driftwood. One was a heavy and the other a light wagon. He found several feet of surveyors chain and a quantity of Spencer rim fire cartridges.

A Mr. Bradley Buckworth found a human skull in this vicinity and Lem Daniels found a brass bound compass. There are rumors of many other parts of a surveying outfit being picked up so that it is certain that the party made camp at this place and occupied their first few days preparing for the work ahead.

Buffalo Bill Scouts.

An expedition from North Platte, headed by Lieutenant Haskins with William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) as a scout, left that place the first day of October in search of them.

On the tenth day of October, Lieutenant Haskins reported to his superiors as having found, about 30 miles southeast of McPherson, where Mr. Buck's party was supposed to be, two tripods, a camp and camp equipage and some canned fruit. The camp had the appearance of being deserted. He also saw some wagon tires.

Not long after this a band of Indians were captured, and it was admitted by them that they had a fight with a party of white men at that point: that it was a desperate one, and that last to fall was a tall man, who was in charge of the party.

The Indians denied having burned the bodies of the men, but careful search by expeditions sent out for the missing parties, failed to find them and as not one of them ever returned or has since been heard of it was generally supposed at the time that after killing every member of the gallant little band, their bodies were disposed of by the Indians in a manner peculiar to their own.

The loss of the Buck party was reported by the Nebraska Herald and stated that Lieut. Jacob Almy under General Duncan reported the capture of a squaw who told of an encounter between a party of white men and Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler of Spotted Tail's band.

She said that four young Indians ware killed. The Indians pursued the aggressors in the direction of Beaver Creek, took their horses and rations, destroyed two wagons and killed five of the whites, the rest of them escaping.

Survived First Attack.

In light of the knowledge we now have there is no doubt but that while in this camp in Red Willow county that Buck's party was assailed by a superior force of Indians and that several of them were killed, that they abandoned two of their wagons and started back to the fort.

Just how many men were killed or who they were at this first onslaught will never be known except that Buck most certainly survived and with the remaining others started east.

They reached a point just south of the present little town of Hollinger on what is now known as the Harmon farm about forty miles east of the first camp, where they were again attacked. From all evidence seven or eight men reached this camp and four escaped only to die within a short time. The wagon which they had

retained was abandoned there and later burned. The four fled, evidently on horseback for we know that Buck was mounted.

Wild Cat Canyon.

Reaching a gap in the hills bordering Wild Cat Canyon they again came in sight of the Beaver and at a spot not far from the mouth of the little canyon, two of them were overtaken by the bloodthirsty foe and died at their hands. In proof of this Isasiah King found and buried their skeletons in 1880 on the southeast quarter of section 23.

For a time, Buck seemed to bear a charmed life for he and one other were still fleeing for their lives. They reached the forks of the Beaver and the Sappe and succeeded in getting about a half mile farther before they too were overtaken.

The south half of the southwest quarter of Section 24, Township 2, Range 21, was originally homesteaded by a Mr. Hewett who built a log house and barn. When Daniel J. Mclnturf and his family came to this vicinity on April 4, 1877, they purchased the land and improvements. Shortly after their arrival they found human bones strewn about, a saddle with an old type of stirrups, which had the name Nelson Buck stamped on them as did a Colts revolver which was found close by. Many articles of clothing were found and arrow-points and lead bullets have since been picked up in large numbers.

They marked this spot and the bones were gathered up and with the other things placed in a box which was stored in the barn.

Burial In 1880.

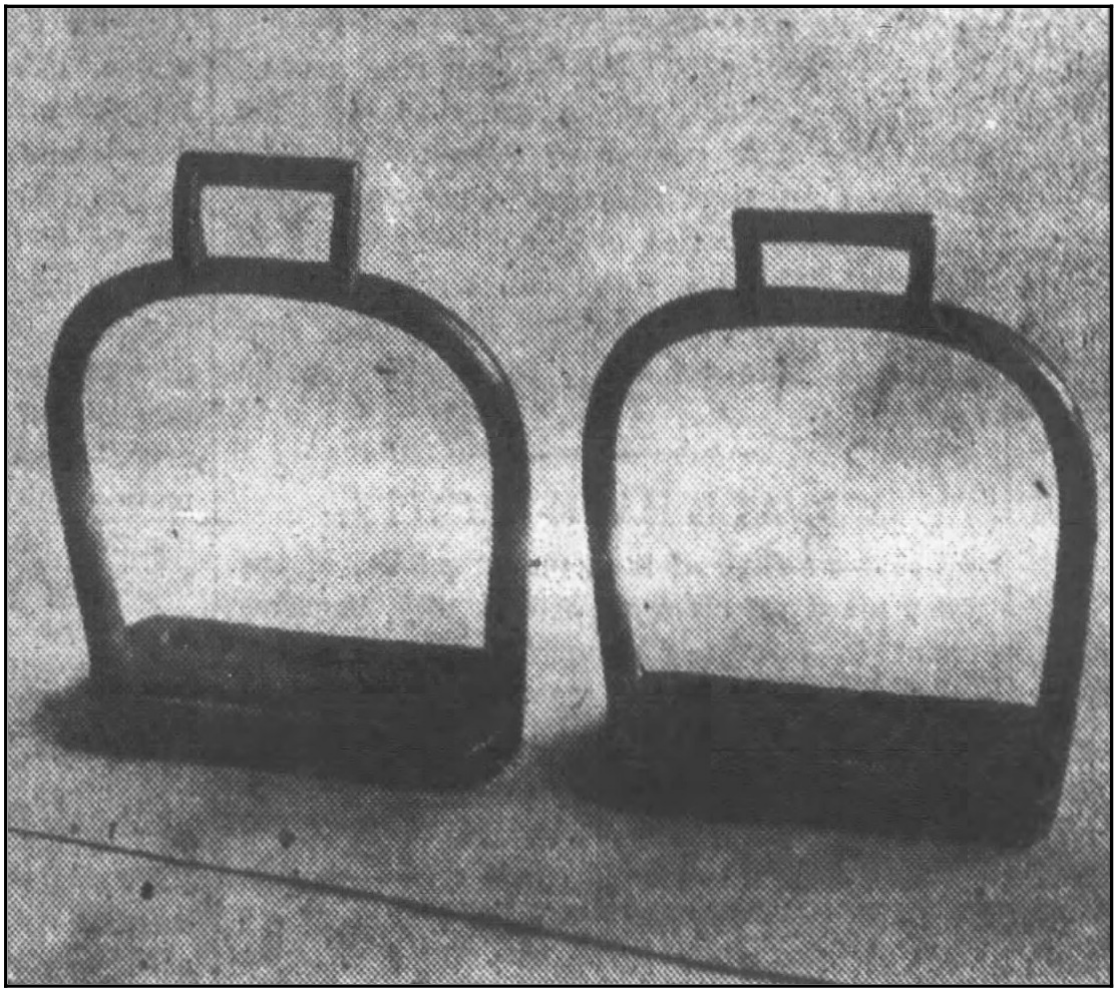
About the year 1880, Robert B. Harrington of Pontiac, visited the Mclnturfs and after making as thorough an investigation as possible to satisfy himself that Buck had really been killed, he took the bones back to Illinois where he buried them in, the Buck family lot.

The Mclnturfs wondered what Harrington's object was in doing this but it is quite evident that this search had been instigated by Mrs. Buck for shortly afterwards she married a Mr. Owens.

Inquiring of Mrs. Mclnturf why the location of these finds were not made public previously, she said that as they had no newspapers or other means of informing themselves at the time so the name of

> Buck meant nothing more to them than the finding of a dead tramp by the name of Smith would nowadays.
>
> The stirrups from the saddle were given to the Hastings museum and the gun taken to California by Parks Gribble.
>
> As in the majority of cases in which Indians have attacked the white man, the whites were the first aggressors and there is no doubt that the killing of Buck and his party was entirely justified in the eyes of the Indians and one cannot wonder that they sought revenge for the wanton slaying of one of their number. It is to be deplored that Buck and some innocent boys were made to suffer for the ill advised act of two of his men.
>
> There has been some talk of erecting monuments on the site of the Buck tragedies but these things have a way of being forgotten and it has never been done although it would be a fine thing could every historical spot in the state have some sort of a marker before those who know of their locations have passed away.

This article also had four illustrations with one caption. The four photographs are shown below and then the shared caption.



Shared Caption

Strange tales of those who came to the new country, but who never returned, are part of the lore of the early Nebraska. Some of those counted as missing may have been adventurers who went farther into the west, to lose contact with the folk at home; some may have become ill; some may have met death in Indian troubles. There always is room for imaginative speculation under those circumstances.

The mystery of the Nelson Buck surveying party, arrived here to go into the western part of Nebraska shortly after its statehood, has become somewhat clarified with the years. Nelson Buck, Buxton McGregor, and William McCullough were members of that ill-fated group. The stirrups of Buck's saddle survived as a memento of that difficult expedition.

CHAPTER 13

1937 to 2008

Death of Harry McGregor in 1937 in Pontiac

His obituary was published in the October 21, 1937, issue of the Streator Times.

> The Streator Times
> October 21, 1937
>
> **Harry McGregor, Born in Ottawa, Dies in Pontiac**
>
> A resident of Pontiac practically his entire life, Harry Buxton McGregor died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Mary Noel, 308 W. Grove street, at 6:45 AM, Thursday. Mr. McGregor had been bed-fast for the past twelve days.
>
> Services for Mr. McGregor will be held Friday morning at 10 AM from the Raleigh J. Harris funeral home with Dr. John H. Ryan, Pontiac prison chaplain, in charge of the service. The body will be cremated in Chicago following the service.
>
> Harry Buxton McGregor was one of a party of five accompanying Nelson Buck of Pontiac, a surveyor, who received a government appointment and was ordered to proceed to Nebraska to adjust the boundary lines. Other members of the party were: Frank McFarland, James Sager, John Nettleton, and Will McCullock. They left Pontiac June 29, 1869, and none of the boys was over 16 years of age.
>
> At Plattsmouth, Neb., they were joined by others, when they crossed the Missouri river and proceeded to Fort Kearney. The Indians were on the warpath, but after some delay and no prospects of a guard from the fort, Mr. Buck decided to press on. Mr. McGregor and Nettleton finally returned to Illinois, and the rest of the company lost their lives under circumstances still remaining a mystery. Mr. McGregor was the last survivor of the party.
>
> Mr. McGregor was born April 17, 1851, at Ottawa, Ill., the son of John and Margaret Buxton McGregor. He was married to Emma Laura Willard, at Randolph, N.Y., on September 1, 1884.

Surviving Mr. McGregor are his two daughters, Mrs. Lucy Melbourne, Chicago, and Mrs. Mary Noel, Pontiac. Mrs. McGregor died on August 21, 1936.

Five grandchildren survive. A son, Charles W. McGregor, died on March 23, 1934. Two brothers, C. A. and Alonzo H., and a sister, Mrs. Minnie Laws, also preceded him in death.

Comments on the 1937 Obit of Harry B. McGregor

The sentence in the obituary, "They left Pontiac June 29, 1869, and none of the boys was over 16 years of age." is incorrect. John K. Nettleton was 20 and Harry McGregor was 18.

At this time, the death date for John K. Nettleton is unknown.

Nelson Buck Monument in 1939

The March 31, 1939, issue of the Trenton Register published the story below.

A historical marker is to be placed near Marion, Nebraska, to mark the place where the Nelson Buck surveying party was killed in 1869 by a band of Sioux Indians. The marker is being arranged for thru the Cambridge monument works.

Nelson Buck Dam Proposed in 1957

A new dam was proposed in 1957. The author assumes the dam was named in honor of Nelson Buck.

The Hastings Daily Tribune
December 17, 1957

Army Engineers Asked to Protect Beaver Creek Area

KANSAS CITY (AP) — A delegation of Kansans and Nebraskans Monday said damages of more than $2 million were caused by eight floods in 1957 along Beaver Creek and asked the Army Engineers to do something. Governor Victor Anderson. led the five Nebraskans, and said he felt strongly that some protection should be given. Harry Strunk of McCook, president of the Republican Valley Conservation Association, was a leader in arranging the meeting.

TO GET STUDY

Colonel L. E. Laudon, district Army engineer, replied that he would study the voluminous report and then decide if he would recommend a detailed study of the problem. He said that decision probably will be reached by mid-February. Two tributaries of Beaver Creek originate in northwest Kansas and join at Atwood. The creek then flows into Nebraska and hits the Republican River near Alma. Its watershed area is an estimated 800 to 1,000 miles.

The Bureau of Reclamation now is surveying the valley and has proposed the Nelson Buck Dam as a tentative location advantageous for irrigation, Colonel Laurion said.

NO DISCUSSION

He said there was no direct discussion of the dam at Monday's meeting but he believed the delegation's report contained opposition to the proposed location. Many valley residents feel the dam would be too far downstream to provide flood protection, he added. William Salome, representing Governor George Docking, headed the group of eight Kansas state officials and legislators.

Nelson Buck Monument Updated in 1961

The newspaper article below describes how the monuments were updated.

Cambridge Clarion
April 6, 1961

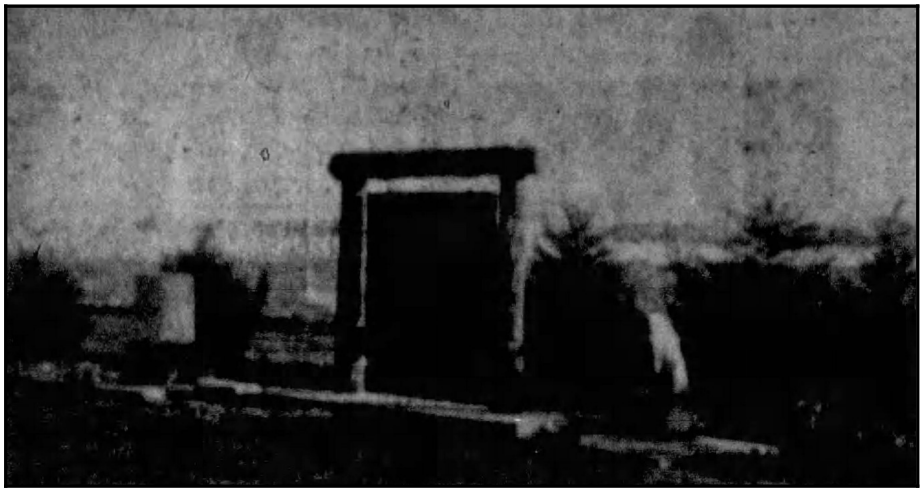
Nelson Buck Massacre Monument

(by Mrs. Sam Liebrandt)

The new Nelson Buck Massacre monument and roadside park, located just one-half mile west of Marion, on the Beaver Valley highway, is now complete. The grass and trees have been planted, and a pleasing driveway arranged The entire project was completed by the Civil Engineer Corps, and consists of three monuments. The new one is in the center, the original to the far right, and the second one containing names of those who lost their lives here is at the left.

The original marker was first placed on the exact spot where the massacre took place, on the bank of the Beaver Creek. The second was placed on Highway 89 several years ago.

The new location, beside the new location for Highway 89, presents an inviting park for motorists, with grass and trees planted, along with a good driveway.



1965 Story About Another 1869 Surveying Party in Nebraska

There was another surveying party in 1869 working around the same time as the Nelson Buck massacre. A copy of this story is shown below.

Beatrice Daily Sun
October 31, 1965

OUT OF OLD NEBRASKA
Wiltse survey party, 1869

During the late summer of 1869, a party under Chauncey Wiltse surveyed the country north of the Republican River in what is now western Franklin and eastern Harlan counties.

A member of the party, twenty-year-old William Alford Richards, kept a diary which is now in the archives of the Historical Society. Richards, after a long career of surveying, was elected governor of Wyoming In 1894. Though he kept track of how many miles was surveyed each day, young Richards was more concerned with recording his encounters with buffalo and other wild game.

On August 9th, as the party made its way from Fort Kearny to the Republican, Richards wrote, "Saw a few stray buffalo but as we didn't understand hunting them didn't kill any."

One month later, September 11th (the day the party started back to the fort), Richards felt so sure of himself where buffalo was concerned that he and a friend, wanting to save ammunition, pursued a wounded bull on foot, and, while his friend decoyed the buffalo, Richards came in from behind and knifed it to death.

Indian Danger

Indians were a great danger in the Republican country of 1869. General Carr and his Re-publican River expedition had pursued the Sioux west through this same country earlier in the summer, and, at the same time the Nelson Buck survey party was attacked and massacred further up-river in southern Red Willow and western Furnas counties.

Though Richard commented regularly on the possibility of an Indian attack, the party saw Indians only once, and these did not come near, but fled down a canyon, when Richards and a friend, not knowing of their presence, fired into a herd of buffalo.

A week earlier, the men had sighted "a fine claybank mare with an Indian lariat on," and the day before the Indians were seen, two of the men had succeeded in catching her.

Richards wrote, "She is quite gentle, but has evidently broken away from the Indians in some fight, as they could have followed her had she only strayed."

The two men later sold the mare for eighty dollars at Fort Kearny.

Only Bad Luck

Having spent the early part of the summer surveying in the vicinity of Fort McPherson, where one of the party had drowned in the Platte, the Wiltse party was well trained by the time they reached the Republican country. Their only bad luck occurred on their fist day of work: "Geo. Kendall in attempting to swim Prairie Dog creek which was swollen by recent rains, with the tripod, became confused and in trying to swim against the rapid current lost the instrument."

It was the only tripod in camp, and Wiltse had to return to Omaha to replace it. "We will have about seventy five miles to go by land and then two hundred on the cars to procure an instrument worth twenty dollars."

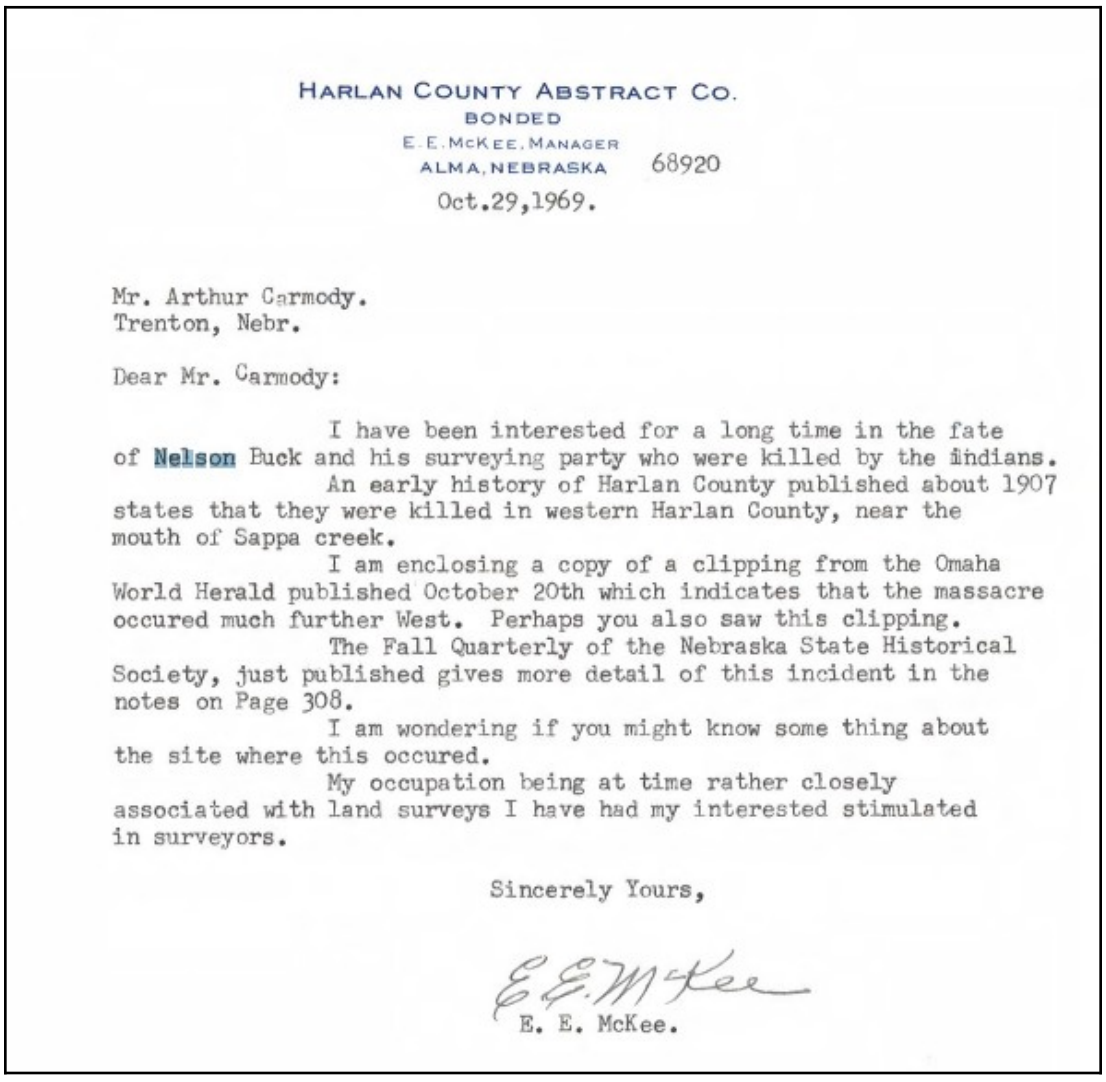
Even with an added delay caused by flooding creeks, the Wiltse party finished their work ahead of schedule and had a few days rest at Kearney Station, before going on to another short surveying job north of the Platte In the vicinity of Willow Island.

Richards' later survey work took place in Wyoming, but Chauncey Wiltse continued to survey in Nebraska, establishing the northern boundary in 1874.

After serving as Chief Clerk in the office of the Nebraska Surveyor General, he practiced law, published a newspaper, and owned Grand Island's leading hotel and a bank in Nance County.

100th Anniversary Information About the Buck Massacre

The letter below indicates information about the massacre was published in the 1969 Fall Quarterly of the Nebraska State Historical Society on page 308. A copy of this publication has not been found at this time.



HARLAN COUNTY ABSTRACT CO.
BONDED
E. E. McKEE, MANAGER
ALMA, NEBRASKA 68920

Oct.29,1969.

Mr. Arthur Carmody.
Trenton, Nebr.

Dear Mr. Carmody:

I have been interested for a long time in the fate of Nelson Buck and his surveying party who were killed by the Indians.

An early history of Harlan County published about 1907 states that they were killed in western Harlan County, near the mouth of Sappa creek.

I am enclosing a copy of a clipping from the Omaha World Herald published October 20th which indicates that the massacre occured much further West. Perhaps you also saw this clipping.

The Fall Quarterly of the Nebraska State Historical Society, just published gives more detail of this incident in the notes on Page 308.

I am wondering if you might know some thing about the site where this occured.

My occupation being at time rather closely associated with land surveys I have had my interested stimulated in surveyors.

Sincerely Yours,

E. E. McKee.

E. E. McKee.

1976 Surveying Book

In 1976, Lola Cazier wrote a book titled Surveys and Surveyors of the Public Domain 1785-1975. An excerpt from this book about Nelson Buck is shown below.

Frontiersmen by Choice

While many early surveyors became expert woodsmen, plainsmen, and mountaineers, they were not really like most of the trappers and cowboys who lived a similar frontier life. The surveyors were, for the most part, not born to primitive conditions. They were often among the best educated men of their time.

Some of them were accustomed to luxury, and many of them had known the pleasures of a well-ordered, comfortable existence. The two-sided world to which they adapted was of their own choosing. They chose an exhausting and exciting life of adventure in the marking of America's frontier lands, even though a number of them were as familiar with good food and service in elegant surroundings as they were with tin plates of salt Pork and beans in a survey camp.

Buck's Tragedy

With all their problems, most surveyors fared better than did Deputy Surveyor Nelson Buck. Buck had been a surveyor for more than 30 years when he made application, in 1867, to survey the area from Red Willow and Frontier Counties in Nebraska westward to the Colorado line. His application was refused because of the hostility of the Indians in the area.

Buck reapplied in early 1868 and explained that he would have a large, well-armed survey party. He felt sure they would be able to protect themselves. He also mentioned his long and successful career as a frontier surveyor. The officials relented, and on June 29, 1869, an item in the Plattsmouth, Nebraska, newspaper Stated that Buck had received the surveying contract.

This became locally known when Buck arrived in Plattsmouth, and hired two teamsters, bought provisions, arranged for wagons and teams, and started out for Fort Kearney. Buck wrote a letter on July21, 1869, and mailed from Fort Kearney. In it he mentioned that he had not obtained the arms and ammunition at the fort that he had wished to take with his party.

He also wrote that reports of more trouble with the Indians had caused some of his men to "take other employment."

That letter was the last communication anyone ever received from Nelson Buck or the men who were with him when he started his survey.

In October it was found that no corners had been set. No evidence of any survey work could be located, nor could the survey party.

Later, a place where the survey party camped was found, silent witness to what must have taken place. The camping equipment was there, as were tripods, part of a wagon, canned goods, and even an engraved silver spoon. The campsite was less than 40 chains north of the Kansas Line, about 4 miles southwest of Danbury.

2004 Recounting of Nelson Buck Massacre by McCook Gazette

This newspaper published several stories about Nelson Buck back in 1911. The story can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/2mhz8jdm.

The 2004 recounting of the story is shown below.

> The McCook Gazette
> March 1, 2004
> By: Walt Sehnert
>
> **The Nelson Buck massacre**
>
> Though what is now Nebraska had been a trail that one had to cross to get to somewhere else for many years, it was really not considered a part of the United States until the middle 1800s. Gen. Stephen Long had led an army expedition across Nebraska, along the Platte and North Platte Rivers in 1820. In his report to Congress he described the Platte River valley as "almost wholly unfit for farming," and the High (dry) Plains as "The Great American Desert."
>
> So naturally, Congress, seeing the region as worthless property, promptly declared the region as "Indian Territory," and forbade any sort of White settlement in what is now Nebraska.
>
> Still, many pioneers continued to cross the region, following the Oregon Trail, to settle in the rich farming areas of Washington and Oregon. The Gold Rush of 1849 added thousands of would-be miners to the trek across our region, and caused a popular demand that Nebraska be changed from Indian Territory to a Territory of the United States and open to White settlement. But for several years territorial status was denied because Southerners and Northerners were divided on the issue of allowing slavery in the proposed territory.
>
> Finally, in 1854, Senator Stephen A. Douglas (Abraham Lincoln's old adversary) was able to get the Kansas-Nebraska Bill passed, which allowed citizens in Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether or not slavery should be allowed.
>
> The Territory of Nebraska was huge compared to the size of the present state of Nebraska, and included what is now Nebraska, plus parts of Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado. But the population of the entire territory, in 1860 was just 2,732. (Whites only, Indians didn't count).

(Joe Magrath, formerly of McCook, has graciously loaned some of the old maps of the region, from his fine collection. These are on display at the Bieroc Café, in downtown McCook).

When the Union Pacific began building its railroad across Nebraska, settlement followed, and at the end of the Civil War the U.P. sent out thousands of pamphlets to Easterners, even to Europeans, describing Nebraska farmland in glowing terms. This brought a flood of settlers and demand for statehood.

But again Nebraska fell into the middle of a political squabble. In 1867 President Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, was fighting for his political life against a movement of impeachment. He figured that two new senators from Nebraska, which he assumed (correctly) would be Republican, might be enough to swing the vote against him, so he vetoed the bill for Nebraska statehood.

Nevertheless, Congress passed an act of admission for Nebraska, over the Johnson veto, and on March 1, 1867, Nebraska entered the Union as the Nation's 37th state.

David Butler, a Republican, was elected the first governor of Nebraska. At that time the information about Nebraska was still sketchy, so one of Butler's first acts was to bring parties of surveyors into the state, to bring information about just what the state offered in the way of geography and of opportunities for settlement.

Nelson Buck, of Illinois, was one of the surveyors who applied for one of the surveying jobs. Buck noted, in a series of letters to Surveyor Gen. P.W. Hitchcock, that he had been in the business of surveying for 34 years, and included letters of recommendation from some of the most prominent men of the time, including Judge Treat and Abraham Lincoln. He felt well qualified for the surveying job.

Buck anticipated that there might be trouble with the Indians, and said that he was prepared to "… employ such force as will be likely to protect our party (of 12) surveyors. It is not profit alone that would induce me to make this attempt, but the desire to be employed where I can see the West -- so then as far as the fear of Indians is concerned, that has little or no weight in the matter."

According to the Plattsmouth Herald, for June, 24, 1869, " … Nelson Buck, Esq. of Pontiac, Illinois, a brother of John F. Buck, of this county, has a contract … for establishing standard lines in the western part of the state."

For some reason Nelson Buck ran into difficulties in obtaining arms and protection when he arrived at Fort Kearney. He wrote to the Surveyor Gen., "I regret now that I did not procure arms, etc. at Plattsmouth. I made application through Capt. Pollock for leave to draw such as were needed (at Fort Kearney), but did not get them. Some, and indeed several of my company, feel discouraged at hearing of Indians … and want arms so that if we must fight Indians, all can take part in the matter.

Buck and his party waited at Fort Kearney for some days for the requisition giving them arms and an escort. Finally, growing impatient, they set out alone, poorly armed as they were. After three days travel they pitched camp along the Republican in what is now Red Willow County. Here Buck ordered John Nettleton and H.B. McGregor to return to Fort Kearney and await the requisition for arms and an escort, and come back with them to that camp. This was the last that was seen or heard from Buck party.

Since there were no survivors of the men that stayed on the Republican, just what happened to surveying party has had to be pieced together from several sources.

1. In September of 1869, an Army unit, under Gen. Duncan, captured a squaw who told that a party of four young Indians in advance of the main band, under Pawnee Killer and Whistler, were attacked while crossing the Republican near Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow Creek. Three Indians and one white man were killed. The Indians pursued, captured the party's horses, destroyed two wagons, and killed five whites. The rest of the whites escaped toward the Beaver Creek.

2. Willard Buck, son of Nelson Buck, led a search for the missing party in the fall of 1869. He found parts of two or three wagons on the Beaver Creek (just west of the present town of Marion). He found some scraps of paper, which belonged to his father, and also two tripods belonging to the party.

3. In an interview with the Omaha Herald, Jan. 1870, the Sioux Chief, Pawnee Killer reported that on their way to camp on Beaver Creek they discovered a party of six white men, with

wagons and horses. A charge was made at once, in which three Indians were killed. The whites made a stand in the timber on Beaver Creek. Gradually, the Indians increased their force to 200 warriors. The battle lasted the entire afternoon and at sundown the last of the six white men were killed and scalped.
Pawnee Killer had led the fight in person. He was pleased with the amount of ammunition that had been captured. He claimed that the whites were very brave and many of his warriors were wounded. When asked about more white men that should have been in the surveying party, Pawnee Killer speculated that they might have escaped from the battle at Beaver Creek, only to be set upon by another war party of Indians and killed in another location.

At any rate, no survivors of the Nelson Buck surveying party were ever found -- only the bleached bones of some bodies in the vicinity of the battle, a grim chapter in our history; a story of bravery and over confidence, which led to disaster -- but part of our struggle to transform Nebraska from worthless "desert" to "Our Home on the Plains".

Source: A series of articles by John Cordeal in the McCook Tribune during the summer of 1911.

CHAPTER 14

2009 to 2023

Interesting 2009 Daily Leader Article About Life of Nelson Buck's Widow

In 2009, Barbara Sancken wrote an interesting article which summarizes the life of Maria Tracy, widow of Nelson Buck. A copy of the article is shown below.

Pontiac Daily Leader
February 28, 2009

Maria Owen —A Plucky Pontiac Pioneer
By: Barbara Sancken

When Maria Tracey Fellows Buck Owen died 100 years ago today at the age of 97, she was not only the oldest resident of Pontiac but also the oldest settler of Pontiac. One of the very early pioneers, she had much to do in the building of Pontiac. She witnessed almost the entire development of Livingston County and had seen its wild lands transformed into beautiful farms and homes.

To her dying day, she was known as an amiable and hospitable woman of remarkable memory, and was well respected for her business sense and her generosity to all good causes. She was one of the original stockholders in both the national banks in the city and displayed remarkable business and executive ability.

Maria was born in New York Jan. 16, 1812, to Starks and Esther Tracey, whose ancestors predated the Revolution in America. In 1840, at the age of 28, she married Augustus Fellows, who, with his brother, owned a large farm in Oswego County N.Y. In 1842, Augustus sold his interest in this farm to his brother Isaac and purchased Isaac's property in Pontiac, Ill., and moved his family here that fall.

To backtrack a bit, the title of the land in the town site of Pontiac and considerable adjoining land was vested by right of preemption to Henry Weed and his brothers-in-law, Lucius and Seth Young, but, before a patent was obtained from the Government, the Youngs both died in 1837 (the year Livingston became a county).

Weed, then, in 1839, entered the land and the title of the whole tract in his name. Soon after this, Isaac Fellows, a brother-in-law to the Youngs, came from New York to administer their estate and secured to himself as heir, their interest.

A friendly settlement was made, by Weed transferring an undivided one-half interest in the whole tract to Isaac Fellows. Thus Fellows and Weed became joint proprietors of the town and adjoining farmland.

Isaac Fellows then sold all of his interest to Augustus Fellows, and other parties, who had laid some claim to the Young estate, quit-claimed to Augustus. In 1842, Henry Weed died, leaving, as his heirs, Henry Weed Jr, John P Lewis and Henry Stephens - the last two by virtue of their marriages to Weed's daughters.

Augustus and Maria came to Pontiac in 1842 by way of the Great Lakes and the Wetland Canal in a small propeller boat as far as Chicago. They had brought with them all their household effects, which were conveyed, then to Ottawa by teamsters and from Ottawa by hired teams. A farm of 200 acres and a number of town lots belonged to the estate they had traded their comfortable New York farm for, before coming west, on that in 1842, they owned practically all of what had become the city at the time of her death 100 years ago.

There were only three families living in Pontiac in 1842 and the buildings of the town consisted of a few small frame houses and the courthouse. The platted streets were really only trails — either —dry and dusty, muddy or frozen in ruts, depending on the season.

Rattlesnakes, large timber wolves and other wild animals were numerous and tall prairie grass, with its constant danger of fire, surrounded everything.

The farm, which adjoined the village on the east, had a two-room log house with fireplaces in both rooms. Fellows said some of the town lots, although the value was quite low with whole square blocks selling for $5. He then turned his attention to farming. Life was harsh, sometimes cruel, and often lonely for the early settlers.

There was much sickness and, with little medical resource, often resulted in death. In 1847, on the lot now occupied by Evenglow Lodge (where Woodrow had built his home in the late 1800s on what was then known as Washington Square), Fellows built the first large hotel in Pontiac, and also a large barn.

A prairie fire consumed it not long afterward but he immediately rebuilt them. Fellows and their two little daughters, ages seven and two, died in the same week during the cholera scourge in 1849. Having lost their three other children prior to this time, five in the nine years of their marriage, Maria was now left alone and the management, as well as the work of the hotel fell on her.

It would be hard to imagine what she must have gone through in those early days. She had moved here in 1842, and by 1849, the population numbered 80. But the cholera scourge that summer brought everything to a standstill. Cholera broke out in the hotel, supposedly brought there by a young couple from the east, and, before it could be checked, several of Pontiac's most prominent citizens had died. Altogether 13 died in Pontiac, most of whom died at the hotel.

For more than a year Maria carried on the hotel and farm, but found it very difficult, and, in the fall of 1850, she married the debonair Nelson Buck, a widower with three children, who had come to Pontiac shortly after the cholera outbreak.

Buck had received a good literary and musical education and was for some years a teacher of vocal music. He also was a surveyor in Peoria County before moving to Bloomington in 1840 where he also established a nursery.

Buck took charge of her estate, which still consisted of the farm, the hotel and many town lots and undivided real estate around Pontiac. By his sound business judgment he put the estate into good shape. In the various places he had lived, Buck had become somewhat prominent in business, social and musical circles. While residing in Bloomington, he was one of the prominent musicians of that place. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church and its choir there, and early on introduced a violin as a part of the music, much to the horror of some of the good, staid old members of the church, a few of whom arose and walked out of the church.

After moving to Pontiac, he led the choir in the Methodist Episcopal church of which he and Maria were members. When Maria first located here, the only religious services were prayer meetings held in the courthouse on Sundays. Buck was one of the early trustees of the village of Pontiac and took an active part in every movement for the improvement of the village and much credit was given him for its substantial growth just prior to and after the close of the Civil War.

Maria and Buck conducted the hotel, now renamed Buck's Tavern, and also the farm, and their place became the leading hostelry in this section. In those days before the railroad was built, drovers often stopped there in large numbers. One man would come in an hour in advance of the rest, saying that 12 or 14 men would be there for supper. They also had a large barn for the teams of the many movers passing through this part of the state.

In the spring of 1854, when the Chicago & Alton Railroad was built, they boarded the construction hands and did an extensive business. Maria entertained Abraham Lincoln, Judge David Davis and other illustrious men. They never permitted a bar to be run in connection with the hotel, but ran it on strict temperance principles.

In 1852, the first preaching service for the Presbyterian sect in Pontiac was held in Buck's Tavern and when the church was established in 1855, with five members meeting regularly in the school house where the former Livingston County Jail was built, the Bucks were there. Buck's Tavern burned down July 9, 1856, but was again rebuilt.

Being a surveyor, Buck was a useful member of the little colony then settling on the prairie surrounding Pontiac. Maria laid out two additions to the city from her original farm while she was Mrs. Buck.

On June 26, 1869, a downpour started that became, to this day, the worst flood in Pontiac's history. Train tracks and bridges were washed out. Only the homes on the highest hill north of town remained free of water. The north slough swelled to the site of a river, washing over town and farmland. Deep water covered everything within six or seven blocks of the courthouse square. The father of six small children drowned at his home in the 400 block of East Water Street while trying to save his front yard fence. Farmers lost their livestock and crops for that year.

Buck's skill as a surveyor secured him the appointment as government surveyor and he was sent to resurvey the line between Kansas and Nebraska. He left Pontiac June 29 for Plattsmouth, Neb., leaving Maria alone to face the flood and its aftermath. Buck was last heard from at Fort Kearney, from which place he had started for Fort McPherson. It was later learned Indians had killed him.

Maria, now 57, was again alone with large property to care for, including the farm, hotel, and city lots. She continued to conduct the hotel for many years, renting it to others at times so she could concentrate on other projects.

She also established a home on Water Street, and, in 1877, married Elijah Owen, a farmer who had retired in Pontiac. While married to Owen, Maria laid off another addition to Pontiac. Her additions to the city are known as Buck's first and second additions and Owen's addition. A great many deeds in Pontiac carry her name.

Mr. Owen died at her home on Water Street in 1897, and, in 1899, at the age of 87, Maria built an elegant home at 413 N. Main St., where she died 10 years later. This home is now the Martin-Burke Funeral Home.

Maria Owen

2016 Article About Early Surveyors

On January 12, 2016, Marie Bartlett wrote a story for the True West: History of the American Frontier. Her story was titled Walking the Line and covered early surveying in the West. The story can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/yhdpmzfd.

An excerpt from her story about the Nelson Buck party is shown below.

> **Buck's Last Line**
>
> As for the surveyors, the "Indian menace" was a genuine threat. Cheyennes, Arapahos, Sioux, Pawnees and Kickapoos roamed the region over hunting grounds that whites were determined to grab and develop.
>
> One renowned case in 19th-century Nebraska history became known as the "Nelson Buck Massacre," an incident in which a surveyor and his party disappeared in July 1869 and were never seen alive again.
>
> After Nebraska Territory entered statehood in 1867, Buck waited two years for the federal government to award the Illinois surveyor the contract. His job was to survey Red Willow and other Southwestern counties in Nebraska Territory in order to confirm the Kansas-Nebraska boundaries.
>
> While out scouting, crew members spotted a band of Indians, killing three in what appeared to be an unwarranted attack. One of the crew was also killed. An Indian escaped, reporting the murders to his tribe, which set a chain of retaliatory events in motion.
>
> Over the next few days, the Indian band pursued what remained of the survey crew, taking their horses, their rations and destroying two wagons, as well as killing five white men. Buck's remains were later identified by his saddle and revolver—his name was inscribed on the weapon.
>
> Though historians say Buck and his crew made errors in judgment, including underestimating dangers from Indian attacks, the tragedy continues to be commemorated in Nebraska's surveying history.
>
> "Theirs was a hard life with a tragic ending," the plaque reads today, set alongside Nebraska Highway 89 near Marion, within a

mile of the massacre site, by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

2021 Facebook Posting by the Museum of the High Plains in Nebraska

This museum posted the following information.

> Nelson Buck, 61 years old, of Pontiac, Mich., lost his life while surveying the young state of Nebraska, in 1869. Buck and his survey party left Fort Kearny - without a military escort because of a lack of soldiers - in late July (152 years ago this month) and headed for the Republican River and the Beaver Creek in southwest Nebraska.
>
> It's believed the party was killed in mid-August, by Sioux Indians led by Pawnee Killer and Whistler. Their bodies were never found.
>
> A first memorial stone, believed to have been erected in the 1930's, was vandalized and destroyed. The American Society of Civil Engineers erected a second memorial later, to "pay tribute to this human sacrifice given in the opening of the Western Frontier."
>
> Come to the Museum of the High Plains for more information on Nelson Buck and his party: Stanley Meecham, James Walteman, William McCullock, F. C. McFarland, J.C. Haldeman, J.L. Logan and H.C. Levi.
>
> The museum and the Historic Carnegie Library are located at 413-421 Norris Avenue and are open Tuesday through Saturday, from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. CT. There is no admission charge, but there is an elevator and air conditioning.

Two Mistakes in the 2021 Museum Posting Above

Nelson Buck was from Pontiac, Illinois, not Pontiac, Michigan. Many people easily confuse this fact.

F. C. McFarland’s last name is actually spelled McFarlane.

CHAPTER 15

2024

April 2024 Nelson Buck Article by the Sidney Sun-Telegraph Newspaper

A copy of this article can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/4y3knp3j.

A copy of this article is shown below.

The Sidney Sun-Telegraph
April 18, 2014
By: M. Timothy Nolting

Across the Fence: Missing; Nelson Buck survey party

On January 12, 1909 Mr. Robert Harvey, chairman of the committee on marking historic sites, presented his report at the annual conference of the Nebraska State Historical Society. Among the many sites that he requested to be recognized and memorialized with an appropriate monument was the location of the assumed but unconfirmed massacre of the Nelson Buck survey party. Official records of the U.S. military at Fort Kearney and Fort McPherson indicate that of the ten members of the survey party who had disappeared no bodies had been found.

Gathering the details of this tragic event in Nebraska history required the piecing together of events, investigations, observations, telltale evidence and supposed eyewitness accounts. Much of this information was collected several years after the actual events.

Mr. Harvey began his report by noting that "...the work of the deputy surveyors was done in a hostile Indian country in advance of white settlement. The surveyors were therefore continually exposed to danger and were obliged to be always on the alert to avoid surprise and be prepared at all times for attack. It is remarkable that so many small surveying parties were able to maintain themselves through all the years of Indian hostilities with the loss of only about a dozen men, a few horses and mules and perhaps $5,000 worth of camp equipage, provisions and arms." Apparently the majority of those losses were attributed to the Nelson Buck party.

Sixty-year-old Nelson Buck was an Illinois surveyor with more than 30 years experience in the trade and during his career had worked alongside a young Illinois surveyor named Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Buck made application for the position of deputy surveyor for the newly adopted state of Nebraska in December of 1867. Whether or not there was a related question on the application, Mr. Buck deemed it necessary to pen the following statement indicating that he was prepared to "...employ such force as will be likely to protect our party of surveyors. It is not for profit alone that would induce me to make this attempt, but the desire to see the West – so then as far as the fear of Indians is concerned, that has little or no weight in the matter."

The force that Mr. Buck intended to employ was a Spencer rifle for each man of the survey party along with a good supply of ammunition and a military escort to his final destination. Mr. Buck's application was approved in July of 1869 and he was appointed a deputy surveyor of Nebraska for the purpose of resurveying the Kansas and Nebraska border in Red Willow County.

As soon as Mr. Buck received his appointment he made preparations to leave his home in Pontiac, Illinois. In Pontiac he hired five young men with intentions of filling out the remainder of the crew at Plattsmouth, Nebraska. On July 5, 1869 Nelson Buck along with 11 men, most between the ages of 17 and 20, left Plattsmouth for Fort Kearney.

The men were: Nelson Buck, J. L. Logan, J. C. Haldeman, H. L. Levi, F. C. McFarland, J. R. Nettleton, W. McCulloch, Jas. Wolteman, J. V. Brown, Linden L. Crocker, Stanley Meecham, H. B. McGregor.

At Fort Kearney Mr. Buck requested an issue of six Spencer rifles with 200 rounds of ammunition for each and a military escort to Red Willow County. None of the requests were forthcoming and Nelson sent a dispatch to the Surveyor General, Robert R. Livingston: "I regret now that I did not procure arms, etc. at Plattsmouth. I made application through Capt. Pollock for leave to draw such as were needed but did not get them. Some, indeed several of my company, feel discouraged at hearing of Indians... and want arms so that if we must fight Indians, all can take part in the matter."

The survey party waited several days at Fort Kearney and then, impatient to begin, the party set out for Red Willow County to begin the survey they had been contracted to complete. Among the 12 men, Buck possessed a muzzle loading rifle, one of the men carried a rusty old shotgun, another had a pistol and a carbine but very little ammunition for the carbine and H. L. Levi carried a large bone-handled, monogrammed knife with which he repeatedly claimed that he would, "...kill the first Indian he saw." There were other weapons but the overall arsenal was meager.

After a three day journey, Nelson Buck and his crew pitched their base camp on the Republican River about a half-mile from the Nebraska and Kansas border. No doubt fearful of the potential danger and the ill prepared condition of the party, Mr. Buck immediately sent two men, J. R. Nettleton and H. B. McGregor, back to the fort to wait for the requested arms and return with the military escort.

Nettleton and McGregor left immediately and the ten men left behind would never be seen nor heard from again.

The military never responded to the request for arms. Tired of waiting and apparently disinclined to return to the survey crew on the Republican, J. R. Nettleton returned to Illinois. McGregor continued to hang around the fort and took a freighting job for a few weeks then drifted, eventually hiring on with a local cattle outfit.

In late September or early October of 1869 a reconnoitering party under the command of Lieutenant Jacob Almy, Fifth Cavalry, spent considerable time scouting the area around the Republican River and its tributaries. During those maneuvers a small band of Sioux was captured. Among them was a woman who told them that in the previous August, the Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler were moving from the Republican valley to Beaver Creek. An advance party of four warriors was crossing between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow when they were attacked by a group of white men, not soldiers. Three of the Indians were killed and one white man. The surviving Indian returned to the main body and reported the incident. Pawnee Killer and Whistler led a band of warriors against the white men and returned saying that they had killed five more of the white men that were not soldiers but four others had escaped.

In January of 1870 the Omaha World Herald interviewed Pawnee Killer. He told of the battle on Beaver Creek and how nearly 200

warriors had battled an entire afternoon before the six white men were killed and scalped. He said that the whites were very brave and that many of his warriors were wounded. When asked about the other four men, Pawnee Killer remarked that they must have escaped and been killed by another war party at another location.

Other scouting parties discovered evidence of a running battle between the Indians and the group that was supposed to be the survey party. On Beaver Creek, some distance from the attack on the main party, local settlers later discovered evidence that indicated the survivors were trying to make it back to Fort Kearney to the northeast.

About 50 miles from the site of the first attack burnt wagons were found and two skeletons were located in an area now called Wild Cat Canyon. Their remains were buried in 1880 by Isaiah King. In Furnas County, on the farm of Mrs. Daniel McInturf, human bones were found that were believed to be those of Mr. Buck.

The identification was made, according to Mrs. McInturf when "...we found parts of the saddle and pieces of his clothing. The saddle had Buck's name on it. There were also many gun balls and arrowheads. A boy by the name of Parks Gibble found the revolver. It also had his name on it. The saddle was cut to pieces, little by little by people wanting souvenirs of the massacre."

Despite significant evidence to the contrary, in 1909 H. B. McGregor of the original twelve sent the following letter to the Pontiac Daily Leader in Pontiac. Illinois. It reads in part:

"Editor Leader: I had the pleasure of an interview with Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) last evening and he requested me to write up a statement from him as to the facts relating to the Nelson Buck party in 1869. I had always understood that the bodies of this party were never recovered, but Colonel Cody says he found all the bodies and that none of them had been burned, so it was not likely any of them had been taken alive.

They were, of course, scalped and mutilated, but presumably after death. Colonel Cody himself helped to bury all of them and the bodies now rest near the headwaters of Plum Creek, Neb. After performing this duty, later, with his command, he trailed the Indians to their village, killed quite a number of them - all they could - and dispersed the balance. They found in the village some of Mr. Buck's surveying instruments, so he knew he got the

right Indians. These hostiles were under the leadership of Roman Nose, one of the most famous fighting chiefs of the Sioux.

Colonel Cody wishes the Leader to publish this statement that the few remaining relatives and friends of this unfortunate expedition might know that the government not only buried their dead, but thoroughly avenged them.

Colonel Cody is the last and best of his type whom I have known and the debt that the nation owes them for their pioneer work on the frontier can never be estimated nor fully appreciated."

So, was Cody pulling McGregor's leg or was McGregor pulling the editors leg? Small wonder that the pages of history can become so blurred.

Maria Buck Letter Found in April of 2024

In April of 2024, the author reviewed items that had been in a locked storage area for at least 30 years. These items were in the archives of the Livingston County Historical Society, but had not been reviewed for at least 30 years.

A portion of these materials were donated by the estate of Rev. John H. Ryan. Dr. Ryan (1860-1948) was the first President of the Livingston County Historical Society when it was formed in 1924. He was also Chaplain at the Pontiac Prison. Dr. Ryan likely knew Harry McGregor, because Dr. Ryan performed his funeral service.

Apparently, Mrs. Nelson Buck traveled to Nebraska to try to find her missing husband. The materials found in 2024 were not dated. It is likely Mrs. Buck accompanied her stepson, Willard Buck, when he went to Nebraska to search for his missing father. The materials found in 2024 are shown below.

RETURN IN FIVE DAYS TO
Illinois State Reformatory
Pontiac, Ill.

Dr. Ryan
Chaplain

Nelson Bucks picture
worthy, look up his history in
relation to Pontiac, Ex County
History & Livingston County, Much
about his history, in John H. Ryans letter,
All that is known & his death by Indians

Copy of letter from Maria Buck (Mrs. Nelson Buck) written to stepdaughter Cordelia Buck Watson from some place in Nebraska during the search for the Nelson Buck party following the massacre. I have copied the town she wrote from as well as I could but can't make out what it was. Evidently at relatives who lived in Nebraska at that time tho. Mostly copied her spelling too but added capitals and periods.

Louise Algeo Crow.
Great granddaughter of
Nelson Buck.

2 brigs (bags) Neb Oct the 2C

Dear child Cordelia:- We received your letter last evening. was glad to here from you. Willard got here, a week ago last Monday and wrote to you the same evening. Tuesday morning he started for Omaha, and last evening we got a letter from him from Fort McPherson. He says the tripods are not your fathers. There has nothing yet been found as we can learn that was your Fathers. Willard wrote of nothing new only his safe arrival there and his intentions to go out and search for his Father. He says not be uneasy about him if we do not hear from him in a week or two. He says there was some snow and still

snowing and the weather
quite cold. The scout that
was going out with him arrived
there the same night. The warm
weather now is favorable for them
I still have some hopes we
shall yet see him (your father)
come in yet but the Lord only
knows. Let us look to him for
support in all our afflictions
for his promise is unto us in the
sixth and yea in the seventh
he will not forsake us. Let us put
our trust in him our sure
support under all afflictions
for he doth not afflict willingly
but for our good.

I did not answer your letter
for I waited to learn something

more definite concerning
your Father, and did not
feel as if I could write. If we
hear anything positive I
will let you know. Give my
love to my sisters and all
enquiring friends. Tell them
and Mary Dwyer I will write
them as soon as I can.
I shall come home as soon
as Willard returns if he
ascertains anything positive.
Your Uncles family are well.
All send there love to you.
So no more at present.

Yours truly

Maria Buck

Also in Dr. Ryan's materials was an undated letter he wrote about Nelson Buck. A copy of this letter is shown below.

THE FATE OF NELSON BUCK

Some years age the writer received a letter from Mr. A. Y. Brooking of Hastings Nebraska, stating that there was a revival of interest in the fate of the Buck Surveying Party, which went out from Pontiac in the mid-summer of 1869, and after a two days journey beyond Ft. Kerney, were attacked by hostile Sioux Indiana, and the entire party was killed except Nettleton, and Buxton McGregor, who had been sent back to the fort to ask for assistance.

Mr. Brooking had been directed in his inquiry by Dr. Marshall of Pontiac, who had met him on a visit to his daughter, Mrs. Jenson. The correspondence was carried on for some time, and with the new finds in Nebraska much of real history was furnished concerning Mr. Buck, and some old pictures wore found of &. McGregor, Will McCulloch, and Mr. Buck standing by his surveying, instrument, and letters from relatives, with clippings of reports of parties sent out to solve if possible, the fate of the party, were sent to Mr. Brooking, who his finally completed a history of all that is now known of the fate of the Buck party, and some of the mystery so long baffling the investigators, has been cleared up.

This week the writer received the manuscript from Mr. Brooking, asking that he and Mr. McGregor go over the manuscript for any corrections noted, and with the story as it is about to be published, were pictures of Mr. Buck's stirrups bearing his name at the place where his body was found, and of his last camp. These will all be placed in the collection at the Court House here in time.

The county in which the Massacre occurred long a matter of controversy has been cleared up, some being killed in Red Willow Co. and others in Furnace Co., the exact spot where Mr. Buck fell marked by his saddle, bearing his name, and part of his surveying instrument, parts of a watch, and his revolver, as well as a skeleton presumably that of Mr. Buck, indicating that contrary to the early account, that they were all killed in the camp, they had tried to escape after the first attack and were killed as overtaken. Three Indian bodies found buried in a hollow tree, wore wrapped in blankets, and in one blanket was found a blood stained letter written to Will McCollough by his sister from Morris, Grundy Co., and well known to the older people of Pontiac. The mother of the

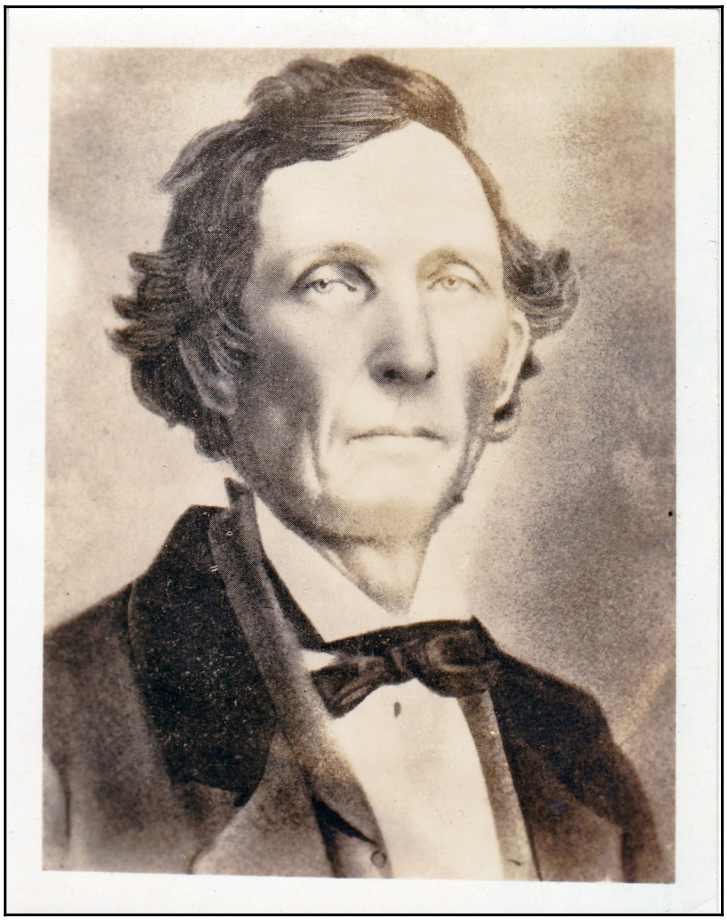
McCulloch family later married a Mr. Taylor and lived her later life in this city.

Ft. Kerney is now a Museum, and the Buck stirrups are there. Mr. McGregor accompanied the Chaplain to the services at the prison recently, and in the later part of the service assisted in giving the story, which the young men received with great enthusiasm an expression of appreciation of one who had dared the difficulties and dangers of the border line between civilization and savage life.

Dr. John H. Ryan

Sketch of Nelson Buck in Dr. Ryan's Papers

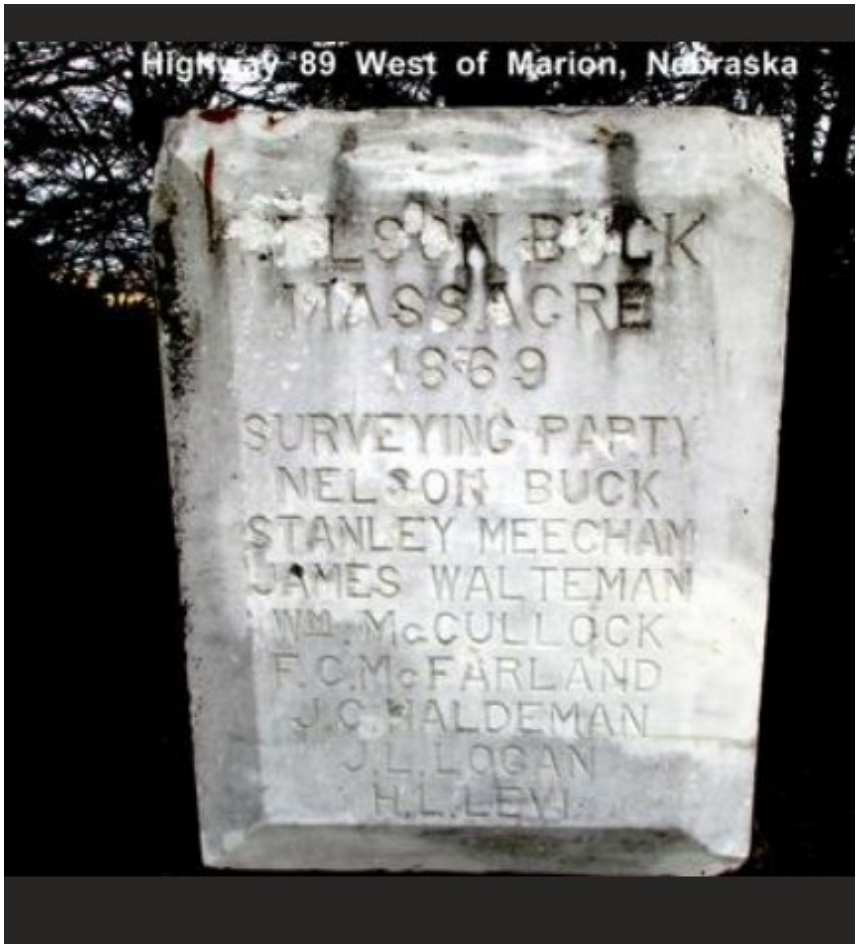
Also in Dr. Ryan's materials was a sketch of Nelson Buck. A copy is shown below.



Nelson Buck Historical Markers in 2024

According to the website, http://www.oxfordnebraska.net/nelson-buck.html, there are two markers for the Nelson Buck party in Nebraska.

Highway 89 West of Marion, Nebraska
THE NELSON BUCK MASSACRE
THE FATE OF THE NELSON BUCK SURVEY PARTY LIES SEALED FOREVER IN THE DUST OF THIS MEANDERING VALLEY. THEIRS WAS A HARD LIFE WITH A TRAGIC ENDING.
NELSON BUCK WAS COMMISSIONED IN 1869 TO SURVEY IN SOUTHWEST NEBRASKA. WHILE ENCAMPED ABOUT 1 MILE UPSTREAM FROM THIS SITE, THE PARTY WAS ATTACKED BY SIOUX INDIANS LED BY PAWNEE KILLER AND WHISTLER. DURING THE RUNNING BATTLE WHICH FOLLOWED, ALL MEMBERS OF THE PARTY WERE KILLED. NEBRASKANS PAY TRIBUTE TO THIS HUMAN SACRIFICE GIVEN IN THE OPENING OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER.
ERECTED BY THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS
American Society of Civil Engineers


Highway 89 West of Marion, Nebraska
MASSACRE
1869
SURVEYING PARTY
NELSON BUCK
STANLEY MEECHAM
JAMES WALTEMAN
Wm. McCULLOCK
F.C.McFARLAND
J.C.HALDEMAN
J.L.LOGAN
H.L.LEVI

2024 Web Site with Nelson Buck Party Info Written by a Surveyor

Jerry F. Penry was born in Nebraska and is a surveyor by trade. He has written many articles and given seminars about surveying. His web site may be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/tjbvztx8.

A description for one of his past seminars on Nelson Buck is shown below.

> The lure of obtaining government contracts and surveying in the wild west brought many eastern surveyors into regions of Kansas and Nebraska that required them to step outside their familiar environments.
>
> These areas were often far removed from civilization, so the need for the basic essentials of food, water and shelter had to be well thought out in advance. Most importantly, the need for protection from hostile Native Americans was something that was foremost on their minds. The military was under no obligation to provide escorts and protection for the deputy surveyors and their crews who ventured into these uncertain areas.
>
> Some surveyors wrongly assumed that protection would be provided and were thus ill-prepared to defend themselves. In 1869, a surveyor named Nelson Buck from Pontiac, Illinois, assembled a crew of mostly young boys to come to the Nebraska Territory to survey the lines of his contract.
>
> After reaching Fort Kearny, and discovering that a military escort was not available for them, Buck made the fateful decision to go on without protection in one of the most hostile regions known at that time.
>
> His crew never surveyed a single mile and was massacred near the Kansas/Nebraska state line. The details of what exactly occurred during the fight have been shrouded in mystery for over 150 years.
>
> A fresh examination of the circumstances of this event will be discussed to separate out the many myths that have been perpetuated over the years by non-surveyors who have attempted to write the historical account of this unfortunate incident.

Additional Documents Available in 2024

The Nebraska State Historical Society is now called History Nebraska per their website.

> History Nebraska was founded in 1878 as the Nebraska State Historical Society by citizens who recognized Nebraska was going through great changes and they sought to record the stories of both indigenous and immigrant peoples. It was designated a state institution and began receiving funds from the legislature in 1883. Legislation in 1994 changed History Nebraska from a state institution to a state agency. The organization is headed by Director and CEO Jill Dolberg.

This organization has a folder containing many documents relating to the Nelson Buck massacre. Unfortunately, these documents have not been digitized yet. Below is a description of the documents they have in the folder.

HISTORY NEBRASKA MANUSCRIPT FINDING AID
RG0828.AM: Nelson Buck, 1807-1869
Correspondence, etc.: 1912-1959
Pontiac, Illinois: Surveyor
Size: One folder

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE
Nelson Buck worked as a professional surveyor in Pontiac, Illinois. In 1869 Buck was appointed deputy surveyor for the newly formed state of Nebraska. He was sent to resurvey the Nebraska-Kansas boarder in western Nebraska. Along the Republican River in Red Willow County, the survey party encountered a band of Oglala Sioux led by Pawnee Killer. In January of 1870 the Omaha World Herald interviewed Pawnee Killer. He described how, after a lengthy battle, the six white men were killed and scalped. When asked about the other four men in the survey party, Pawnee Killer remarked that they must have escaped and been killed elsewhere by another party.

For a more detailed account of the Nelson Buck survey party, see "***Across the Fence: Missing; Nelson Buck survey party***," by M. Timothy Nolting, The Sidney Sun-Telegraph, April 18, 2014, vol. 141, no. 77.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE
The collection is comprised of papers that relate to the massacre of the Nelson Buck survey party in 1869 in Red Willow and/or Furnas Counties. Relatives, Nebraska State Historical Society staff, journalists, and other interested researchers (Maria A. Cross (niece of Buck), A.M. Brooking, H.B. McGregor, George L. Berger to name a few) piece together the story through correspondence

and reports written based on research or firsthand accounts. The material dates from 1912-1959.

Attached to the 1959 letter written to Donald Danker by Kenneth Kauffman are two maps: “Location of First Indian Attack on Nelson Buck Party in Fall of 1869”; and “Location of Second and Third Attacks on Nelson Buck Party Fall of 1869”. There is also family history information for the Buck family from Pontiac, Illinois, and the Berger family from Cass and Red Willow Counties, Nebraska.

See the photo component [RG0828.PH] for images of the Nelson Buck historical marker.

See the Paul Davis Riley collection[RG0949.AM] for additional information on Nelson Buck.

See the U.S. Surveyor General collection [RG0510] for related information.

See the Library catalog and the Nebraska History index for published materials about Nelson Buck.

INVENTORY
Correspondence and maps

Subject headings:
Allen, E.E.
Berger family
Berger, George L., 1848-1934
Berger, J.E.
Brooking, A.M.
Buck family
Buck, Nelson, 1807-1869
Carmody, Arthur J. “Art,” 1899-1987
Cordeal, John F.
Cross, Maria A. (Buck), 1864-1945
Danker, Donald Floyd, 1922-2005
Frontier & pioneer life
Furman, Archie C., 1864-1953
Furnas County (Nebraska) — History
Harvey, Robert, 1844-1923
Hill, G.C.
Indians of North America — Nebraska
Kauffman, Kenneth O.
Latrom, R.J.
Massacres — Nebraska
McCoy, Samuel
McGregor, H.B.

Piper, Joel Alfred, 1851-1942
Red Willow County (Nebraska) — History
Ryan, John H.
Sheldon, Addison Erwin, 1861-1943
Surveyors
Watkins, Albert, 1848-1923

Use of the History Nebraska Folder on Nelson Buck

The author assumes this folder is in Lincoln, Nebraska. Pontiac, Illinois, is about 530 miles from Lincoln and it is an 8 hour drive. At this time, the author has not made this trip to review all of these materials.

Chapter 16

Unsolved Mysteries

Whenever historical research is performed, there are always mysteries that arise. The story of the massacre of the Nelson Buck surveying party has it's share of mysteries.

Was the mother of Clarissa Buck the first or second wife of Henry Buck?

It is not clear at this time which wife was the mother of Clarissa Buck.

What year did Nelson Buck start surveying?

According to the letter Nelson Buck sent to the Surveyor General of Nebraska in late 1867, Mr. Buck said he had 34 years experience as a surveyor. If we subtract 34 from 1867, this means he started surveying in 1833. We do not know how he first learned surveying.

How did Nelson Buck get the cash to buy land in Peoria in 1840?

He likely saved his money that he earned as a surveyor to purchase this land.

Did Nelson Buck ever meet his first son that legally changed his last name from Buck to Wethey?

At this time, there is no evidence that Nelson Buck was aware that his first son had married and that Nelson Buck had five grandchildren from this marriage.

Why did Nelson Buck want to go from Pontiac to survey in the dangerous country in Nebraska at the age of 59?

When Nelson Buck wrote his first letter to the Nebraska Surveyor General requesting a surveying contract on December 27, 1867, he was 59 years old. When he got the contract and left Pontiac for Nebraska on June 29, 1869, Nelson Buck was 61 years old. In that era, most men that lived to be that age were content with working as long as they could or retire and enjoy their grandchildren.

In one of Nelson Buck's letters to the Surveyor General, he said "It is not the profit alone that would induce me to make the attempt, but the desire to be employed where I can see the west."

Maybe Nelson Buck knew his days were numbered and he wanted to have one last adventure before he died?

Where and when did John K. Nettleton and his wife die?

The 1880 U.S. Census recounts that John Nettleton and his wife had moved from Pontiac to Joliet. There is no 1890 U.S. Census records because they were destroyed in a fire.

The September 13, 1888, edition of Iron Age magazine had a brief notation about John K. Nettleton.

> J. K. Nettleton retires on account of ill health.

On March 10, 1942, Charles Nettleton Strevell, the brother of John K. Nettleton wrote a letter in which he stated the last time he heard from John K. Nettleton was during the World's Fair in Chicago. At that time, John K. Nettleton said he had moved from Minnesota to Oregon and he was looking for work.

Unfortunately, Chicago had two World's Fairs. The first was in 1893 and the second was in 1933. We do know know which World's Fair in Chicago that Charles Nettleton Strevell was referring to in his 1942 letter.

John K. Nettleton would have been 44 during the 1893 World's Fair and 84 during the 1933 World's Fair. Statistically, the probability is low that he lived to be 84.

At this time, the author and family descendants have been unable to determine what happened to John K. Nettleton and his wife.

Why did Harry B. McGregor not mention the detail about the Buck party first shooting at the Sioux until late in his life?

For 67 years after the 1869 incident, the standard story seemed to be that Mr. Buck and his young crew were savagely attacked and murdered by the Sioux tribe. The survey crew was simply "minding their own business" and out of nowhere the Sioux attacked them.

The first indication that the Buck party may have initiated the conflict with the Sioux occurred just a few weeks after the Buck party went missing. A captured squaw reported some members of the Buck party had shot and killed some of her tribe.

> On Oct. 3, Lt. Hawkins found a deserted camp, two tripods, and some canned fruits about 30 miles southeast of Ft. McPherson. A squaw captured Sept. 26 by Gen. Duncan's cavalry reported: About August

> 20, when cherries were first ripe, a band of Indians under Pawnee Killer and Whistler crossed the Republican to move over to Beaver between Frenchman's Fork and Red Willow river. Four young men were far in advance. One of them came back and reported the other three killed by white men. Squaws and children went at once into the bushes. The men went toward the Beaver and did not come back until dusk. They said they killed five and destroyed two wagons and the rest of the white men hid in bushes.

By this time, John K. Nettleton had left the area to travel back home to Pontiac. Harry B. McGregor also may have not been in the available in the area to ask him questions about the squaw's allegation the Buck party initiated the conflict.

Harry B. McGregor recounted his story several times in writing over the years after the massacre. He never mentioned that the Buck party initiated the conflict until he was 85 years old. In 1936, H. B. McGregor exchanged letters with a Mr. A. M. Brooking. In these letters, H. B. McGregor apparently added the new detail to the story that the Buck party initiated the conflict.

> Buck was in a quandary, he was told that in a country infested with hostile Indians it was suicide to go on but without funds and the, expense of caring for his party he had no ultimatum. It was a situation to daunt the stoutest of hearts.
>
> After about a week they decided to go on hoping that an escort of cavalry would follow. They traveled for two days finally reaching the Republican river near the present west edge of Harlan county.
>
> Sager and one of the McFarlane boys had openly boasted that they were going to shoot the first Indians they saw, and it was not long until they had the chance.
>
> **Shoot An Indian.**
>
> The evening of their arrival at the Republican river these two boys went some distance from the camp where they met or overtook two Indians. One of these was promptly shot down by Sager but the other gun missed fire and the second Indian escaped. The bow, arrows, and other personal equipment was stripped from the corpse and taken into camp where they were exhibited.
>
> Buck was greatly disturbed by this happening for he was smart enough to know that this fool-hardy act might precipitate a world of trouble so he decided to send Nettleton and McGregor back to the fort to make a last plea for an escort or additional arms.

> The return trip took them thirty-six hours of hard traveling and luckily they saw no Indians. The boys delivered their message but as no troops were forthcoming they were at a loss to know what to do.

The author assumes the reason that H. B. McGregor never mentioned the Buck party initiated the conflict with the Sioux was because it made a better story to leave out this detail.

How Did Nelson Buck Know Abraham Lincoln?

Nelson Buck listed Abraham Lincoln as a reference in his December 27, 1867, letter to the Surveyor General of Nebraska.

A convention of surveyors was held in 1859 in Springfield, Illinois. In that convention, Abraham Lincoln was asked to give his expert opinion on a surveying issue. Nelson Buck may have met Abraham Lincoln at this convention.

At this time, it is not known exactly how Nelson Buck was acquainted with Abraham Lincoln.

Why Did Nelson Buck recruit young Pontiac boys to go on his Nebraska surveying expedition.

Several references indicate that early surveying was definitely a young man's occupation. A lot of physical work was involved with moving the tripods, moving the steel chain, walking long distances, and driving marker stakes. Because Nelson Buck was 61 years of age when they left Pontiac on June 29, 1869, it makes sense that he needed some younger men to do the heavy work involved with surveying.

None of these relatively young men had any experience with Native American conflicts and none of them had served in the military.

In retrospect, it would have made more sense for Nelson Buck to recruit veterans of the Civil War. It was only four years after the Civil War ended, so there should have been veterans available to work that were still in their twenties. Veterans would have had military experience and fighting experience as well. At this time, it is unknown why Nelson Buck chose to recruit these young men for this expedition.

What is the family background of some of the Pontiac boys that went on the expedition?

In his 1937 obituary for Harry B. McGregor, it says the following Pontiac boys went on the expedition.

1. Harry Buxton McGregor
2. John Nettleton
3. Frank McFarland
4. James Sager
5. Will McCullock

The parents and family backgrounds for Harry B. McGregor, John K. Nettleton, and Frank McFarlane are known and are shown in earlier chapters.

Genealogical searches were done to try to identify the parents of James Sager and Will McCullock. At this time, no other family information can be found for Sager or McCullock.

CHAPTER 17

Closing Thoughts

The story of the Nelson Buck surveying party massacre in 1869 is a very tragic story. Nelson Buck was a pioneer settler and surveyor in Peoria, Bloomington, and Pontiac, Illinois. He was a major contributor to the success of Pontiac growing and becoming a successful town.

The young Pontiac men that he recruited to join his expedition were likely between the ages of 16 and 20. Except for John K. Nettleton and H. B. McGregor, these young men tragically lost their lives.

The Nebraska men who joined the expedition also tragically lost their lives.

The true story of what happened after Nettleton and McGregor left the party to go back to the fort for help will likely never be known. Over 150 years after the incident, all we have is bits and pieces of information about the story.

In retrospect, the tragedy was likely caused because Nelson Buck was over-confident and he had no experience dealing with Native Americans. If Nelson Buck had really understood the risks of conflicts with Native Americans, he would have trained his young men not to initiate any conflicts.

It is hoped this book will help to inform future generations about the history of the Nelson Buck surveying party in Nebraska in 1869.

References

All references used in this story were identified at the point they were used in the story.

Recommended Reading

Abraham Lincoln and the Strevell Family of Pontiac, Illinois by Dale C. Maley.

Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Updates by Dale C. Maley.

The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois by Dale C. Maley.

The Story of the Jones House in Pontiac, Illinois, by Dale C. Maley.

The Zoath Yost Family of Pontiac, Illinois by Dale C. Maley.

William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields by Dale C. Maley.

Websites

Most of the rare documents found in doing research for this book were uploaded to Archive.Org. One can search that website using the search term “Pontiac + Illinois” to find these documents. All documents may be viewed or downloaded from this website.

Author Spotlight

Dale C. Maley

One of Dale's hobbies is history, including the history of Fairbury, Illinois. Dale has written over 25 books on Fairbury and Livingston County history. He has also written over 300 history stories for the Fairbury Blade newspaper and FairburyNews.Net. He has given many history lectures to various community groups in Livingston, McLean, and Ford Counties. Dale is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and is Vice-President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

Also by Dale C. Maley

Livingston County History Books

- Abraham Lincoln and the Strevell Family of Pontiac, Illinois
- Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
- Fairbury History Stories: Volume One
- Fairbury History Stories: Volume Two
- Fairbury History Stories: Volume Three
- Fairbury History Stories: Volume Four
- Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors
- Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
- Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
- Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
- Fairbury, Illinois, from Prehistoric Times to Modern Times
- Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
- Franklin Oliver – Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
- History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
- Honeggers of Fairbury, Illinois
- Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Updates
- The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Goudy Brothers of Fairbury, Illinois

- The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
- The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
- The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Zoath Yost Family of Pontiac, Illinois
- Walton Bros. Of Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields